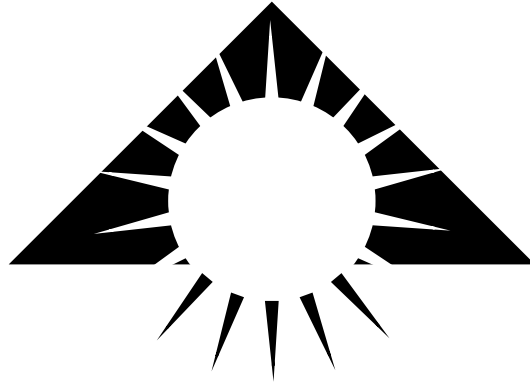


**Family Impact Policy Seminar**  
The Center for Research on Children in the U.S. (CROCUS)  
Georgetown University



**Child Advocacy in Hard Times**

March 31, 2004

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# Child Advocacy in Hard Times

## The panel features the following speakers:

- Tamara Copeland, President, Voices for America's Children
- Helen Cymrot, CROCUS Fellow, Georgetown University
- William T. Gormley, Jr., University Professor, Georgetown University
- Suzanne C. Johnson, President, Voices for Virginia's Children
- Cecilia Zalkind, Executive Director, Association for Children of New Jersey

## The moderator will be:

- Peter Edelman, Professor of Law, Georgetown University

## The contents of this briefing report are as follows:

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**I. Background**

The difficult fiscal times that accompanied the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have forced state-based child advocacy groups to develop new strategies to protect children. State-based child advocacy groups now devote much of their time and resources to preserving programs for children, through budget analysis and advocacy. Three related strategies have proven key to their success in protecting investments in children: (1) promoting coalitions and collaborations to maximize resources and reach common goals; (2) using research-based advocacy efforts to support their positions and demonstrate trends; and (3) creating mass outreach and awareness campaigns.

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Conditions for the average child in the United States continue to improve in many sectors, but statistics also show that hundreds of thousands of children are still struggling. In almost every U.S. state, child advocacy organizations are working to enhance conditions for children – protecting funding for children’s services, helping to bolster the education system, ensuring adequate health care coverage and making certain that those most at-risk are protected, cared for, and rehabilitated.

The role of child advocacy organizations has become more difficult in the last several years however. Difficult economic conditions coupled with state budget cuts mean more children are in need, but state governments are less able to help. In many states, child advocacy organizations have stepped up to help prevent the widening gap between children’s needs and state resources, encouraging state governments to preserve their investments in children despite the hard times. Their efforts have produced new areas of focus and various results.

Our reflections flow in part from an analysis of interview transcripts with the leaders of 50 child advocacy organizations active in state politics. These groups are all affiliates of VOICES for America’s Children, formerly known as the National Association of Child Advocates (NACA). The interviews were conducted by Helen Cymrot and William Gormley of Georgetown University in the summer of 2003 as part of a broader inquiry into the strategic choices of child and family advocacy groups.<sup>1</sup>

**II. Child Advocacy Groups in the United States**

Child advocacy has developed over time from a collection of child anticruelty societies to a vast network of charitable and advocacy organizations, focusing on issues ranging from overall child well-being to specific causes like child health care coverage. There are more than 45,000 non-profit organizations that focus on children and children’s issues today in

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<sup>1</sup> For the product of this research, see William Gormley, Jr. and Helen Cymrot, “The Strategic Choices of Child Advocacy Groups,” Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, April 15, 2004.

the United States, with one group for every 1300 children in the US.<sup>2</sup> Groups range from small, targeted volunteer-led efforts to large, professionally staffed multi-issue organizations. They exist on the local, state and federal levels, often working in coalitions with other similar groups or a national umbrella organization.

These organizations include what the Internal Revenue Service calls “service providers” (501(c)3 organizations) and “advocacy organizations” (501(c)4’s). However, this terminology is somewhat misleading, since 501(c)3 “service providers” do not have to provide any services and are also allowed to engage in advocacy activities. Many private, charitable nonprofit groups typically called advocacy groups are actually 501(c)3 service providers by the IRS designation, allowing them to receive tax-deductible donations and engage in advocacy and limited lobbying.<sup>3</sup> The term “child advocacy groups” refers here to both 501(c)3 and 501(c)4 groups, although the vast majority of groups surveyed were charitable 501(c)3 groups. Groups are typically funded by a mix of foundation funding, public donations and sometimes government grants for services.

### *Current Issues*

Today, state-based child advocacy groups are focusing on a few key issues, all of which have been affected by the difficult fiscal times. Health care (64%), early care and education (59%), budget (34%) and abuse and neglect (28%) were most commonly cited as one of the top three issue areas for child advocacy groups surveyed in the summer of 2003. Within the health care realm, groups are primarily focused on Medicaid reimbursement rates and State Child Health Insurance Programs (SCHIP). Advocacy for early care and education has centered around subsidy rates and coverage more than regulatory issues like quality and teacher qualifications. Focus on budget issues revolves largely around budget analysis, advocacy and awareness and will be discussed more in depth below. Groups that focused on abuse and neglect issues primarily concentrated on efforts for systemic reform.

Virtually every issue area, as well as groups’ larger missions, has been impacted by the economic situation. For example, a group can no longer focus purely on the benefits of early education without acknowledging its cost and presenting arguments for net savings over time. In health care, discussions often include a focus on preventative medicine as a way to reduce later costs, such as with immunizations. For most groups, budget issues have become an overarching theme within other areas of focus.

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<sup>2</sup> DeVita, Carol J., Mosher-Williams, Rachel & Stengel, Nicholas A.J. “Nonprofit Organizations Engaged in Child Advocacy.” Chapter 1. *Who Speaks for America’s Children*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> For additional history of the child advocacy movement, see: DeVita, Carol J., Mosher-Williams, Rachel & Stengel, Nicholas A.J. “Nonprofit Organizations Engaged in Child Advocacy.” Chapter 1. *Who Speaks for America’s Children*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2001.

### **III. Fiscal Crisis in the States**

Two hundred billion dollars in cumulative budget shortfalls have plagued the states over the last three years, leading to spending cuts, tax and fee increases, borrowing measures and one-time remedies to meet balanced budget requirements.<sup>4,5</sup> Thirty-four states have cut state spending on Medicaid and the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) while most states have held education funding levels relatively stable.<sup>6</sup> In addition to spending cuts and state struggles over tax increases, “the fiscal crisis has also had profound political implications,”<sup>7</sup> which have spurred changes in strategy for state-based child advocacy groups.

According to many analysts, the worst of the states’ fiscal crisis is over, but states are likely to be plagued by continued slow job growth, flat revenues, depleted reserve funds and rising health costs.<sup>8</sup> Several states are expected to face large deficits for many years as a result.<sup>9</sup> What has the fiscal crisis meant for state-based child advocacy organizations? For most groups, there was a fundamental shift in strategy as the recession, September 11<sup>th</sup>, and the war in Iraq impacted the states’ budget statuses.

Throughout the 1990’s, state-based child advocacy groups were able to devote energy and resources to promoting government programs or public-private partnerships to help improve children’s well-being. From education to child welfare, new programs were implemented and heralded for their success. In today’s hard times, child advocates have been forced to switch to a new focus: budget analysis and advocacy. By demonstrating the impact of changes in state budgets, advocacy groups have been able to create a new focus on preserving existing programs and investments in children by: (1) promoting coalitions and collaborations to maximize resources and reach common goals; (2) using research-based advocacy efforts to support their positions and demonstrate trends; and (3) creating mass outreach and awareness campaigns. The remainder of this paper will focus on state-based child advocacy groups’ techniques and successes in using budget analysis and advocacy (and related strategies) to cope with hard times.

### **IV. Focus on Preservation: Strategies for Protecting Children’s Programs**

State budget cuts have affected child advocacy organizations tremendously and altered the key issues these organizations address. The main focus of child advocacy

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<sup>4</sup> Broder, John. “Despite Rebound, States’ Budgets are Still Reeling”, New York Times, January 5, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Every state except Vermont requires a balanced state budget, in contrast to the federal budget which has no such requirement. Carlson, Darren K. “State Budget Crisis: Public Counsels Careful Cutting.” The Gallup Poll Tuesday Briefing. Government and Public Policy. Washington, DC: The Gallup Organization, July 1, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Broder, John. “Despite Rebound, States’ Budgets are Still Reeling”, New York Times, January 5, 2004. and Grenblatt, Alan. “*Making Do*” *Governing*. December 2003, p. 31-32.

<sup>7</sup> Broder, John. “Despite Rebound, States’ Budgets are Still Reeling”, New York Times, January 5, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Broder, John. “Despite Rebound, States’ Budgets are Still Reeling”, New York Times, January 5, 2004. and Pierce, Neal “State Budget Quandaries: Any Heroes Out There?” Washington Post Writers Group, January 4, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Pierce, Neal. “State Budget Quandaries: Any Heroes Out There?” Washington Post Writers Group, January 4, 2004.

organizations in these hard budgetary times has been the preservation of funds, programs, and organizations. Governmental budget cuts have forced most child advocacy organizations to fight to keep funds from dwindling. In 2003, instead of focusing on expansion, advocacy organizations committed enormous time and effort towards convincing the government that an investment in children is a solid one, and in the words of Arizona's Children's Action Alliance, the state has the option to "pay now or pay more later," when it comes to the issues children face.

Several advocacy organizations have been working to recover major child service cuts. Voices for Children in Nebraska, for example, had an unusual year in that instead of picking several pieces of legislation to focus on, all efforts were geared towards the budget and maintaining programs in spite of cuts. This state's governmental child care subsidy usually increases annually, but last year, eligibility was cut, and the organization had to focus on preventing a freeze on the subsidy. An organization in the South that did not see a growth in services in the 1990's economic boom has been struggling to retain "bare bone" programs that have virtually no other funds that can be reduced. For this state, also, budgetary advocacy proved to be the center of all activity for the year.

States in dire conditions have used both economic and moral arguments to convince legislators of the importance of funding children's programs. Economically, child advocacy organizations argue that the government will save funds by providing them now instead of in the future. An investment in child health care and early childhood education encourages productivity later in life. If the government appropriates funds for adequate health care and nutrition of young children and their parents, it will save later in mental and physical health bills. In sum, prevention of negative behaviors and circumstances in children are likely to cost society less money than after-the-fact treatment. If the government provides money for quality child care instructors and facilities, it will save money on remedial education and juvenile justice.

Advocacy organizations have also used the moral argument that it is the government's responsibility to provide for the needy, especially children, who have no control over their situations and cannot provide for themselves. As noted by the Colorado Children's Campaign, "We really said that we felt it was the responsibility of adults to take care of kids in a tough time. It was selfish for adults to not want to take more cuts." Organizations advocated that children were the most important beneficiaries of government assistance and should be the last ones to feel the effects of a budgetary crisis.

Another approach towards program preservation was to advocate changes in the distribution of state tax revenues. One organization fought vigorously against the county legislature to restore a 20% across the board budget cut to nonprofit organizations after learning that the government had given \$1 million for a new golf course the same year. In Ohio, the Coalition for Greater Cleveland's Children advocated for increasing taxes so that children would not have to be removed from the Medicaid program. Both organizations used the approach that without provisions for poor children, children would grow up to depend on the state even more for assistance.

Many advocates have decided to delay public advocacy and concentrate on strategies for the future, when funds become more available. For instance, in New Jersey, a major early childhood issue is the availability of high quality preschool for its children. As noted by the Association for Children of New Jersey, organizations have been “laying groundwork” with these key issues, reaching out to other advocates, but have not actively pursued a public information campaign. In general, 2003 saw a retreat from expansionist advocacy and a move towards preparation for expansion in the future.

In these difficult budget situations, child advocacy organizations have focused on preservation of children’s programs with three major approaches: (a) an emphasis on collaboration and coalitions within the advocacy community, (b) a renewed dedication to research and statistical evidence, and (c) a focus on outreach and awareness to the public, state government, and the mass media.

### *Collaboration and Coalitions*

Given the states' budgetary status, coalition-building has become an essential part of child advocacy organizations' approaches to their key issues. One way organizations have preserved child-oriented programs is to collaborate with comparable organizations to achieve shared goals. Coalitions such as Michigan’s Coalition for Children and Families, Kentuckians Allied for Revenue Reform, and Connecticut’s Juvenile Justice Alliance have been successful in achieving goals thanks to their sheer power in numbers.

Groups in several states formed coalitions to advocate specifically against budget cuts. In New York, the Revenue Coalition grouped state child advocacy organizations, labor unions, advocates for the elderly, and more to advocate against budget cuts to vital public services. Instead of separating the budgets into areas such as child services, health care, education and disabled services, the coalition banded together for the common goal of public service preservation. A representative of New York Statewide Youth Advocacy commented that it was the first time she had seen a coalition of this magnitude, with such diversity, work together without conflict. All of the coalition's member organizations understood that without solving the budget problem, the core missions of these organizations could not be fulfilled and a combined effort was more likely to accomplish their goals.

Unlike many other nonprofit organizations, child advocacy organizations often focus on many issues and are therefore able to cooperate with different groups on separate issues. This works to the advantage of multi-issue oriented child advocacy organizations during critical budget cuts, since they are able to utilize resources from several advocacy areas. The Association for Children of New Jersey was able to collaborate with legal organizations on children’s rights issues, immigrant advocacy organizations for family health and nutrition issues, and educational institutions on early childhood education issues. In an effort to promote child health, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy lobbied against smoking indoors by joining with the Oklahoma Alliance for Health and Tobacco. Similarly, a partnership with a children’s rights law center allowed the

Children’s Advocacy Alliance in Nevada to receive essential legal guidance without having to allocate specific funds.

### *Research*

State-level child advocacy groups are also increasingly using research and data to help frame their campaigns and arguments. Through primary research, Kids Count data books, children’s budgets, State Fiscal Analysis Initiative reports and other techniques, these groups are using the vast array of available resources to help them demonstrate trends in child well-being and the need for investment in children.

The groups view providing accurate, credible data as a core part of their role as educators for both the public and policymakers, noting:

- “Everything that we do is grounded in research.” -*Children’s Action Alliance, Arizona*
- “Our mission is to better link research and policy decisions.” -*Child and Family Policy Center, Iowa*
- “Our mission is to become the key source of reliable data for children and families and to encourage policymakers to use that data.” -*Delaware Kids Count*
- “Advocacy organizations need to move to evidence-based advocacy.” -*Child and Family Policy Center, Iowa*

One group, California Kids in Common, has gone so far as to create a “data development agenda” focusing on what data needs to be collected and analyzed to benefit children.

Groups fulfill their research and data strategy by providing three main types of information, which is often released in conjunction with a planned media blitz, maximizing the research and outreach strategies’ impacts. Many groups conduct their own *primary research*, doing original studies in the community or gathering original data when there is not adequate information available from other sources. For example, Children Now in California conducted and published a study analyzing gaps in healthcare coverage for the state. Other groups *contract* out research projects and then report on the findings as part of their strategy. The most common information provided, however, is *secondary research*. Groups synthesize new and existing findings from national organizations, gather facts and repackage them, translate data into digestible forms and perform literature reviews. Many groups provide this secondary analysis through their affiliations with two large national research and policy projects, Kids Count and the State Fiscal Analysis Initiative.

Many of the surveyed groups are grantees of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Kids Count project, which provides state-level grantees with funding for annual reports on child well-being, typically measured on many dimensions and disaggregated by county or city. Many groups stressed the important role that their Kids Count data work played in providing a foundation for their advocacy activities. Kathy Bigsby Moore of Voices for Children of Nebraska explained that Kids Count is the “foundation of everything that we

do... We release the report one week after the legislature convenes and hold press conferences. We first talk about our priorities when the book is released. We also highlight other research that shows the ‘so what’ of these issues.”

Many of the groups are also involved with the State Fiscal Analysis Initiative (SFAI), a project of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the Open Society Institute and the Ford, Charles Stewart Mott and Annie E. Casey Foundations. Through their work with SFAI, groups do extensive budget and tax analysis and produce reports on the effects of proposed federal and state policies on low-income families. “We believe that if we are going to be supporting funding for programs, we need to show that these programs really make a difference,” explains Kansas Action for Children.

In addition to links with national policy and advocacy organizations, several state level groups maintain close ties to local universities. For example, Kids Count in Delaware is housed at the University of Delaware’s Center for Community Research and Service, has access to the research and public service work that professors at the Center are doing and receives all their data from state demographers. Connecticut Voices for Children is closely linked with Yale University, allowing a strong focus on research and staff members who also teach at Yale.

### *Outreach and Awareness*

The last major preservation strategy of child advocacy organizations is a focus on active outreach campaigns to increase public and government awareness of the importance of child advocacy issues, regardless of the economic climate. Keeping key child advocacy issues visible to the government and community is especially important during difficult budgetary times so that children’s programs stay a priority despite budget cuts. Organizations have targeted these outreach campaigns to three main groups - the public, the media, and the state legislature – with specific methods for each sector.

One group targeted for awareness campaigns is the general public. Advocates for Children and Youth in Maryland stressed that expanding public awareness and building up a base of citizen support is the best strategy when funds are low, regardless of the issue. According to this organization, only in good economic times can organizations rely on insider strategies to achieve goals. A popular method of citizen outreach is through e-mail and post mail list networks. Arizona’s Children Action Alliance has a mailing list of 25,000 people, which is used to inform and influence citizens on critical issues such as childhood protection services and early childhood programming. In the District of Columbia, Action for Children empowered the public through its membership program called 1,000 Voices for Children. With this program, the organization informs voters on important children’s issues like health care and welfare. The organization also holds budget training briefing sessions to educate citizens on the budgetary practices of the district. Rhode Island’s Kids Count hosts a Celebration of Children lunch every fall and invites neighborhood and professional groups and members of the congressional delegation to celebrate progress in child health care. This event provides citizen access to legislators and also keeps key issues on the minds of the community.

Media exposure is also vital to increasing awareness on children's issues. Child advocacy organizations have used countless media tactics. For example, in New Jersey, advocates prompted the mass media to publicize a shocking child abuse death and utilize the tragedy as a means to expose the problems of the child protection system. Groups in states like Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Alabama frequently publish op-ed articles to further their causes and conduct press conferences to publicize important research findings.

However, media outreach does not stop at these more obvious strategies. Several organizations have staged demonstrations to attract the media to their core issues. In California, Coleman Advocates staged a "1,000 Kid March", bringing children, teachers, and child care providers to San Francisco City Hall to protect youth programs from the ongoing budgetary cuts to reduce California's deficit. This protest was a media success, bringing childcare and youth programs to the forefront of the city's agenda.

Exposing the state government to the importance of children's issues is the ultimate reason for public and media outreach. The state budgetary crisis brings the importance of child services, as all other governmental programs, into question. Therefore, it is more necessary than ever to portray child services as vital to the progress of the nation. Again, child advocacy organizations have found innovative ways to get their message to their officials. Voices for Children of Nebraska delivered May Day baskets to their state senators in an effort to create visibility of children's issues. In Kansas, Action for Children has a political strategy called the Children's Campaign, in which elected officials are targeted through e-mails, policy forums, and community meetings with citizens to promote children's issues. Frequently, child advocacy organizations also involve themselves directly with state government decision-making.

## **V. Conclusion: Looking ahead...**

Outreach and awareness are vital strategies in difficult economic times, as are active coalitions and reliance on research. Some state organizations predict the state budget crisis to last for some time. The New York Statewide Youth Advocacy organization is predicting even less budget relief in 2004. This organization is preparing to deal with insufficient funds until public officials acknowledge the full impact of state budget cuts. In New Jersey, organizations are more hopeful and believe that current preparations for future growth will be useful in the current and upcoming legislative sessions, as economic hardships slowly decline.

Late 2003 and early 2004 have seen a small increase in economic growth, both at the federal and state levels. Additionally, in June 2003 Congress passed a \$20 billion state fiscal relief package, which could help to protect children's programs in the next few years.<sup>10</sup> This promising future for children's services might lead child advocacy

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<sup>10</sup> "Congress provides \$20 billion in fiscal relief to the states!" VOICES for America's Children, January 2004. Available: [www.voicesforamericaschildren.org](http://www.voicesforamericaschildren.org).

organizations to shift their focus back to traditional advocacy methods like lobbying as economic times improve.

### *Lobbying*

State legislative lobbying has traditionally been a core advocacy strategy for most child advocacy organizations. Even in these difficult economic times, many organizations have been actively using this tactic. Louisiana's Agenda for Children and Arizona's Children Action Alliance have testified before appropriations committees on budget proposals for public service provisions. Regular meetings with the state house and senate committees have proven effective for retaining funds in Maryland. If the economy continues to improve, as experts predict, organizations may be likely to focus more on traditional advocacy methods like lobbying. But they may be able to increase the effectiveness of their lobbying by incorporating some of the strategies successfully employed in budget cutting times, discussed above.

Research by Jeffrey Berry shows that effective lobbying is more likely when organizations have size, expertise, ability to mobilize members, and wealth.<sup>11</sup> The strategies focused on in recent years – coalitions, research, and outreach – may help groups to be more effective lobbyists according to Berry's criteria. The number of members in an organization can correlate directly with its power over the state legislature. Therefore, larger organizations can be more effective lobbyists. State advocacy coalitions, several of which have been discussed, have proven that there is strength in numbers. Similarly, expertise is vital for successful lobbying efforts. Advocates gather data, package it to be user-friendly, and distribute it strategically to key legislators. As mentioned above, this research is essential to influencing government in its distribution of funds to important children's programs. The more effectively an organization can package its expertise and research for state legislatures, the better the lobbying results may be. Mobilization is also crucial for effective lobbying. Strength in numbers also entails strength in mass mobilization by encouraging the public to contact state government through letters and phone calls. Using outreach and awareness techniques highlighted above, organizations can mobilize their members to increase lobbying success. Wealth, also, is a powerful factor in effective lobbying. Organizations that have financial resources are more likely to have access to policymakers, and this access can make advocacy groups more effective. Although most child advocacy groups do not have abundant funds to achieve their goals, optimal use of scarce resources will help organizations reach their goals more quickly.

### *Building Strength – Strategies for the Future*

For child advocacy organizations to succeed in either traditional advocacy methods like legislative lobbying or preservation methods like coalition-building, research, and outreach, groups must continue to find ways to strengthen their positions at the state level to better influence politicians and policymakers. A study by the State Legislative Leaders

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<sup>11</sup> Berry, Jeffrey. "Building an Effective Lobby." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, August 30-September 2, 2001.

Foundation has identified eight techniques that legislative leaders recommend to advocacy groups for advancing children's issues on state legislative agendas.

- (1) It is essential for child advocacy groups to have consistent relationships and visibility with legislators. It is not enough to contact legislative leaders when children's issues are on the table; constant involvement is much more effective.
- (2) Groups must develop "realistic and manageable" agendas that incorporate the groups' goals, but are still open to compromise.<sup>12</sup> State legislators will avoid inflexible groups, as the legislative process is built on the foundation of compromise.
- (3) District-level grassroots advocacy and support can be more productive than statewide approaches. Legislators will naturally be more responsive to their own districts' constituents on children's issues, and therefore it is important that advocacy organizations employ the efforts of local citizens and business leaders.
- (4) Groups need to involve leaders from other sectors to increase the visibility of children's issues. The coalitions discussed earlier in this paper have served this exact purpose, and legislators agree involving the health, medical, and religious communities will further children's issues in state policymaking agendas.
- (5) Employment of bi-partisan strategies and groups is essential. Republican family values are prevalent in state legislatures around the country, and it is vital for groups to maintain ideologies and agendas that do not exclude any political party. Any isolation of political leaders will prove to be counterproductive, and therefore groups must work to include strategies that encompass a broad base of views.
- (6) Active involvement in all aspects of the electoral campaign process will strengthen political ties. If groups participate in voter registration drives and candidate forums, legislators will recognize their dedication and become more aware and involved in children's issues.
- (7) Useable, coherent, and compelling information will help legislators to support and fund children's services. For example, the state budget crisis has forced legislators to justify every expenditure and child advocacy groups have responded with a renewed focus on research and statistical data.
- (8) Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, active involvement in the state budget process is imperative. Child advocacy organizations recognize this, especially in current state fiscal conditions, and legislators encourage groups to continue participation throughout the whole state budget process.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to these legislatively-oriented strategies, administrative and judicial strategies could provide additional venues for positively influencing children's policy and gaining organizational strength. Administrative strategies like commenting on proposed rule changes in programs like Head Start or TANF can have enormous influence on the everyday lives of children. Such strategies are often low-cost, making them even more appealing in these difficult fiscal times. Judicial strategies can also be an effective

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<sup>12</sup> Lakis, Stephen G. and Margaret A. Blood. *State Legislative Leaders: Keys to Effective Legislation for Children and Families*. State Legislative Leaders Foundation: 1995.

<sup>13</sup> These eight points were taken from: Lakis, Stephen G. and Margaret A. Blood. *State Legislative Leaders: Keys to Effective Legislation for Children and Families*. State Legislative Leaders Foundation: 1995.

addition to advocates' arsenal of strategies. For example, the New Jersey *Abbott V. Burke* school funding lawsuit, with advocates help, has shifted the nature of how schools are financed, a massive change conducted largely outside of the legislature sphere.

### *The Continuing Role of State-Based Child Advocacy Groups*

Child advocacy organizations have proven themselves to be a valuable part of the state decision-making process on children's and family issues. From Pennsylvania Partnership's role in helping their governor write legislation on pre-kindergarten to Voices for Illinois Children's efforts to convince the Illinois state legislature to adopt a state Earned Income Tax Credit, these child advocacy groups have repeatedly demonstrated their influence within their states. The growing interdependence between government and nonprofit organizations, like state-based child advocacy groups, suggests that child advocacy organizations will continue to exist and play a valuable role for years to come. These "third sector" organizations are here to stay, not only because their services are essential to the advancement of state welfare, but also because they can serve to bridge the gap between the private and public sectors and provide services that neither of these sectors are able to. With government pressure to "scale down", nonprofits have taken on added importance through social service provisions shifting contracts and grants to the nonprofit sector.<sup>14</sup> Government also often depends on nonprofits like advocacy organizations to provide essential data that can justify the creation or implementation of a program. The preservation of children's services during the past few years, despite severe budget cuts and economic downturns, has demonstrated that child advocacy organizations are vital and resilient; the future generation will no doubt benefit from their relentless efforts.

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<sup>14</sup> Berry, Jeffrey. "Building an Effective Lobby." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, August 30-September 2, 2001.