



The Importance of Ensuring Families Are At The Table

Our nation is facing many challenges and changes, challenges and changes that will significantly impact children and families. The National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE) advocates to ensure that families and family organizations are at the table when decisions about these challenges and changes are being made, and works to provide them with the information and tools they need to be effective.

Our nation was founded on the premise that each person is created equal, and is endowed with unalienable rights including *life*, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that governments are instituted to secure these rights, deriving their powers from the consent of the people. These principles are enshrined in our Declaration of Independence, and should guide our actions as we make decisions about allocation of resources across agencies and issues.

The centrality of these principles to our nation are underscored by the preamble to the US Constitution: "*We the people of the United States*, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, *promote the general welfare*, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." (Emphasis added).

While National PLACE supports the broad principles of equity, accountability, and human rights, our primary commitment is to the principle of involving the people who are most affected in decisions about our nation's priorities, institutions, policies, and budgets.

From the White House, to Congress, to federal administrative agencies, decisions are being planned – and made – today and in the weeks and months to come that will significantly affect our nation's children and their families – the future of our nation. Yet these decisions are being made without a thoughtful and meaningful inclusion of the voices, experiences, and ideas of those most directly impacted. Some of the most drastic changes that need to be influenced by the experiences, expertise, and voices of diverse families and family organizations are below.

Executive Order on Reorganizing the Executive Branch

The President has issued an Executive Order “intended to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of the executive branch by directing the Director of the Office of Management and Budget to propose a plan to reorganize governmental functions and eliminate unnecessary agencies..., components of agencies, and agency programs.” The Executive Order requires the head of each agency to submit a proposed plan to reorganize the agency, if appropriate, within 180 days of the order. While the Order requires a notice to be published in the Federal Register “inviting the public to suggest improvements in the organization and functioning of the executive branch” and orders that submitted suggestions be considered when formulating the proposed plan, this will not ensure that families directly impacted by the closing or reorganization of agencies will have the opportunity to have a real impact on the plans.

President’s Draft Budget Plan

“America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again,” issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), proposes the elimination of funding for the Corporation for National and Community Services, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for Humanities, the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, the Legal Services Corporation, and the US Interagency Council on Homelessness – all agencies with responsibilities that significantly impact children and families. It would decrease funding to:

- The Department of Agriculture by 21%
- The Department of Commerce by 16% (including elimination of the Minority Business Development Agency)
- The Department of Education by 13% (including elimination of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program which supports before and after school programs as well as summer programs and elimination or reduction of over 20 other categorical programs)
- The Department of Energy by 5.6% (including elimination of the weatherization assistance and State Energy programs)
- The Department of Health and Human Services by 16.9% (including a \$5.8 billion cut to the National Institutes for Health, elimination of health professions and nursing training programs despite a severe nursing shortage, and elimination of discretionary programs within the Office of Community Services such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and the Community Services Block Grant)
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development by 13.2% (including elimination of funding for the Community Development Block Grant program)
- The Department of Labor by 21% (including “refocusing” the Office of Disability Employment Policy, eliminating “less critical” technical assistance grants), and
- The Environmental Protection Agency by 31% (eliminating funding for the Clean Power Plan, international climate change programs, climate, change research and partnership programs, and related efforts.)

Changes to Education Requirements

The Secretary of Education unilaterally made significant changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/Every Student Succeeds Act’s framework for states to submit their Consolidated State Plans, significantly weakening both accountability and stakeholder engagement provisions. The template from the previous administration required states to engage in timely and meaningful consultation with stakeholders reflecting the diversity of the state, including districts, civil rights groups, parents, employers, etc., in developing its consolidated state plan. The new template merely states that states can reach out to groups if they want to, but it’s not a requirement: “In its consolidated state plan, each State Educational Agency may, but is not required to, include supplemental information such as its overall vision for improving outcomes for all students and its efforts to consult with and engage stakeholders when developing its consolidated state plan.”

Proposed Administrative Changes to Medicaid

On her first day in office, the new Director of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services sent a letter to states encouraging them to make major changes to their Medicaid programs. In the letter, she and the new Secretary of Health and Human Services Tom Price urged states to alter the insurance program for the nation’s poor and those with disabilities by imposing insurance premiums, charging them for part of emergency room bills, and prodding them to get jobs. Nowhere in the letter does she mention the importance of engaging those currently receiving Medicaid coverage and services in the process of making decisions about whether or not these steps would be beneficial to them or their families. Her letter also indicated her agency’s commitment to “fast track” requests for waivers from Medicaid’s protections, which will likely result in less time for family and consumer input.

National PLACE urges our nation’s Executive and Legislative branches to hearken back to the principles of participatory democracy that are at the core of our existence as a nation. In order to do this, the intended beneficiaries of the programs, supports and services planned for elimination, significant restructuring, budget cuts, etc., including parents/families and the family-led organizations that represent their interests, must be meaningfully and impactfully engaged in discussions about their needs, the programs that currently address those needs most effectively, and improvements that could have a positive impact on their lives and the lives of their children. To find out more about National PLACE, go to www.parentsatthetable.org.