

## **Draft Statement to Investors in Health Reform: Supporting Child Advocacy in Implementation**

In her closing remarks on health reform, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi recognized two advocacy organizations, in particular, as critically important supporters – the American Association of Retired Persons and Voices for America’s Children. AARP expends \$28 million annually on lobbying Congress and is a recognized force on Medicare issues. Meanwhile, Voices for America’s Children and its 60-member organizations throughout the state have resources that enable them to commit less than half that amount to lobbying and public education efforts at both the state and federal levels on all children’s issues.

Still, Voices members were able to play an critical role in shaping health reform to ensure that children’s healthy development was included in the reforms and in mobilizing coalitions and public education campaigns at the state and community levels to demonstrate support. The credibility of Voices’ members in their states and communities for providing evidenced-based advocacy and organizing coalitions and grassroots leadership placed Voices in a unique position for this advocacy. The Voices’ national office coordinated the work and communication across Voices’ state-based advocacy activities and provided up-to-date intelligence to national organizations working on health reform about members of Congress and the goals they had and pressures they faced.

Now, many of the implementation decisions established through health reform – from constructing state insurance exchanges to developing evidenced-based home visiting programs to designing and implementing preventive services – will be made at the state and community levels. While federal health reform has been enacted, it already is facing political challenges in many states.

Voices for America’s Children also was one of a select group invited to participate in the White House announcement of the First Lady’s Initiative to End Childhood Obesity. Without bold actions to improve child health trajectories, for the first time in America’s history the next generation risks being less healthy and live shorter lives than their parents. Voices for America’s Children members have been leaders in their states advocating for attention to the issue of childhood obesity, as well as childhood malnourishment, in improving children’s health, educational, and social development.

The next five years will be critical ones to determine how well health reform is implemented and the degree to which child health and healthy development issues are addressed as part of that reform. It will be critical to have active, evidenced-based public education and advocacy across the country to this end. Voices for America’s Children is seeking a five-year, \$50 million commitment from investors to achieve the goal that all children will secure affordable health care and the services that they need for their healthy development, including clinical, social, and population-based public and community health services.

Voices and its members have the ability to sustain strong advocacy networks across the country to ensure effective implementation and provide for information sharing and learning across states. Currently, however, Voices members and the national office do not have the capacity for the sustained and concerted advocacy activities that are needed to achieve success. A five-year, \$50 million investment is needed to leverage effective use of public funds hundreds of times that amount, to influence those responsible for making decisions on continuing actions to do so, and to positively impact the lives of millions of children.