

Background on Child Poverty & Hunger March 2020

Children need nutritious food every day to grow, develop, and thrive. But one in five children in California lives in poverty.

California has the 5th largest economy in the world with the highest percentage and largest number of children living in poverty of any state in the nation.¹ Poverty is defined as living with the absence of the ability to meet basic human needs, including shelter, food, clothing, sanitation facilities, health, education and information, and safe drinking water. Factors affecting whether someone lives in poverty include income, costs, education and skills, economic opportunity, supportive services, familial and community supports, race, and a variety of other factors.

Living “at the poverty line” means basic human needs may be met, with nothing extra. According to the Harvard Center on the Developing Child, the toxic stress of living in poverty has negative, life-long impacts on a child’s brain development. When children live in poverty, they endure hardships that impair their ability to thrive,² and it impacts their capacity to learn, develop, and thrive as children and throughout their lives.³

Childhood poverty has a short-term impact on educational success and on classroom environments at schools with a high-density of very poor children. Over the long term, it also reduces the strength and capacity of our future workforce.⁴ Poverty increases the likelihood that childhood impairments will result in adult dependency on safety net services.⁵

¹ Laird, Jennifer, et al. “Poor State, Rich State: Understanding the Variability of Poverty Rates across US States.” *Sociological Science* 5 (2018): 628-652.

² “Family Poverty, Welfare Reform, and Child Development.” Greg J. Duncan and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. Source: *Child Development*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Jan. - Feb., 2000), pp. 188-196.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1132232>

³ Duncan, G and Magnuson, K. 2011. *The Long Reach of Childhood Poverty*.

http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/media/pdf/pathways/winter_2011/PathwaysWinter11_Duncan.pdf

⁴ *The Long Reach of Poverty*

http://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/PathwaysWinter11_Duncan.pdf

Consequences of Poverty

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/in-a-land-of-dollars-deep-poverty-and-its-consequences/>

Long-Term Consequences of Growing Up Poor

http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_909.html

⁵ Barton, Paul E, and Richard J Coley. *The Family: America’s Smallest School*. Policy Information Report, Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2007, and Berliner, David C. *Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School*

Poverty is so dangerous for children because their families are more likely to experience homelessness⁶ or to have other basic needs chronically unmet. Children living in these conditions not only experience the depravity of not having their needs met, but are also deeply impacted by the toxic stress that results from chronically unmet needs.⁷ One study found that growing up in poverty more negatively impacts a child's life chances than neonatal exposure to cocaine.⁸

Growing up with unmet basic needs not only impacts the physical health of a child, it also effects their mental health and future potential. This is, in part, because parents who are unable to adequately care for their children are more likely to experience maternal and/or parental depression,⁹ a condition associated with reduced maternal-child interaction known to undermine school readiness among poor children.¹⁰

Poverty also harms children's brain development and early functioning, disrupting their ability to succeed in school and in life.¹¹ These challenges have been documented to reduce the ability of children to cope during difficult situations -- the very skill they need most as a child living in poverty or a young adult trying to exit it.

Ultimately, poverty damages a child's chance to escape, and fuels an intergenerational cycle of poverty. Children who are born in poverty are three times as likely to be poor at age 40 than children not born in poverty.¹² This is a human and a fiscal crisis that we have the ability to solve.

Factors and School Success. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit, 2009.

⁶ CW grants relative to housing costs:

<http://calbudgetcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CalWORKs-Grants-Fall-Short-as-Rents-Continue-to-Rise.pdf> and <http://calbudgetcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CalWORKs-Grants-Fall-Short-of-Covering-Housing-Costs-02252016.pdf> and <http://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/the-calworks-grant-is-lower-than-cash-assistance-for-families-in-22-states-when-compared-to-housing-costs/>

⁷ Evans, G. W. and English, K. 2002. The Environment of Poverty: Multiple Stressor Exposure, Psychophysiological Stress, and Socioemotional Adjustment. *Child Development*, 73: 1238-1248. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00469

⁸ http://articles.philly.com/2013-07-22/news/40709969_1_hallam-hurt-so-called-crack-babies-funded-study

⁹ <http://news.yale.edu/2013/07/29/no-money-diapers-depressing-reality-poor-mothers>

¹⁰ <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412199-infants-of-depressed.pdf>

¹¹ Harvard University Center on the Developing Child. Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/toxic-stress-derails-healthy-development/>

¹² Cuddy, E., Venator, J. and Reeves, R. 2015. In a land of dollars: Deep poverty and its consequences. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/in-a-land-of-dollars-deep-poverty-and-its-consequences/>

Unfortunately, proposed SNAP rule changes at the federal level will worsen outcomes for children already experiencing poverty. We strongly oppose those changes and urge the Administration to withdraw its proposals.

Anti-hunger programs Reduce Developmental Delays Among Children

Ensuring access to child nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP), the largest and most important anti-hunger program, as well as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program, the Summer Lunch Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), the Afterschool Snack Program, and the Women Infant and Children (WIC) Program helps to reduce hunger and improve other health outcomes. Most immediately, addressing food insecurity decreases the risk of developmental delays and improves outcomes such as children's ability to focus and perform at school.¹³ Though there is not yet research to cite, we believe that children who are food secure are also happier and less likely to experience pain and fear.

The cost of not protecting children from hunger and poverty is steep -- researchers estimate poverty currently costs the United States around \$800 billion to \$1.1 trillion a year, including poor health among adults who experienced poverty as children.¹⁴ In early childhood, research on the biology of stress shows how major adversity such as extreme poverty and hunger can weaken developing brain architecture and have a cumulative toll on a person's health in adulthood.¹⁵

Helping families counter these adverse impacts on children, caused by hunger and poverty, will reduce harm to children and also prevent lifelong adverse effects of basic need deprivation on their bodies. For these reasons, Western Center is proud to lead efforts to reduce the experience of child hunger and poverty, and eventually, end child poverty altogether.

About Western Center on Law and Poverty

For over five decades, the Western Center on Law & Poverty has advocated on behalf of individuals with low incomes in every branch of California government—from the courts to the Legislature. Through the lens of economic and racial justice, we litigate, educate and advocate

¹³ East, Chole N. (2016). "The Effect of Food Stamps on Children's Health: Evidence from Immigrants' Changing Eligibility." Denver, CO: University of Denver. Retrieved from <http://www.sole-jole.org/17153.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/28/698617021/report-child-poverty-could-be-cut-in-half-over-10-years-at-a-hefty-price>

¹⁵ Center on the Developing Child (2007). "The Impact of Early Adversity on Child Development (InBrief)." Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu



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around health care, housing, and public benefits policies and administration. Learn more at: www.wclp.org. For more information about these bills or about our legislative positions related to hunger, contact:

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