

Capitol Office
State Capitol, Room 4066
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 651-4006
Fax: (916) 4906
E-Mail Address
Senator.pan@senate.ca.gov



Senate California Legislature

Dr. Richard Pan
Senator, Sixth District

Chair
Public Employment and Retirement

Committees
Agriculture
Budget & Fiscal Review
Education
Health
Budget subcommittee 4

SB 18 – (Pan)- The Bill of Rights for Children and Youth

PURPOSE

SB 18– (Pan) California has the sixth largest economy in the world, and leads the country in innovation and diversity. Yet, according to the most recent Annie E. Casey Foundation report, California’s children rank 47th in terms of their economic well-being, with one of the country’s lowest standards of living among children. One in four of our children don’t have enough to eat every day. Three-quarters of California’s children don’t receive important health screenings. The status quo is unacceptable. We must do better for our children.

Research has consistently demonstrated that high-quality early learning and care; supportive family environments; quality educational opportunities; and preventive, accessible, and comprehensive health care are essential to ensuring every child has the opportunity to thrive in school and life. However, policymakers have made no deliberate, comprehensive effort to ensure California’s children and youth have access to these opportunities. Worse, our children don’t even have the statutory rights to have the most basic of their needs met.

SB 18 establishes a comprehensive framework that defines and governs the rights of all children and youth in California, outlines the research-based essential needs of all California’s children, and establishes standards relating to the health, safety, well-being, early childhood and educational opportunities, and familial supports necessary for all children to succeed.

SB 18 ensures that the Legislature prioritize the rights of children and youth in the state of

California, so that parents and caregivers are empowered and able to access critical services and resources; and so that all children in California have the opportunity thrive and to be healthy, safe, well supported.

BACKGROUND

No state in the nation has established that children’s rights are human rights, or that children have a right to have their basic needs met. Since 2009, there have been several attempts in California to build consensus around the simple concept that children, no matter what their level of need or where they live, have a right to health, safety, well-being, early childhood and educational opportunities, and family supports.

A collaborative effort of local First 5 commissions, California State Preschool and Head Start programs, the California Association of Counties, and elected officials took place between 2009 and 2013, culminating with “The Year of the Child” in 2013.

Through this effort, similar resolutions and declarations declaring the importance of prioritizing children and placing their needs at the core of policy planning where passed in numerous counties including: Merced, Solano, Del Norte, Napa, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Ventura.

In 2009, then Assemblymember Jerry Hill championed a Legislative resolution in collaboration with the Peninsula Partnership Leadership Council in San Mateo to declare that children in California, regardless of culture,

race, gender or gender identify, sexual orientation, religion, or disability have the right to a better world than they inherited. This resolution also stated that the state legislature resolved to invest in all children and youth to meet certain goals, as defined.

Unfortunately, in the seven years since the passage of that Legislative resolution, there has been no coordinated effort of the Legislature, advocacy organizations, and parents to ensure that the needs of California’s children are prioritized and provided for.

Throughout 2015 and 2016, Common Sense Media convened experts in education, health care, and child development through its “Right Start Commission” to analyze the quality, availability, and accessibility of services for California’s most vulnerable children aged 0-5. Their findings resulted in the 2016 release of a comprehensive report with recommendations for improving services to children in California: “Rebuilding the California Dream,” which offers a blueprint for a child-centered system that nurtures every child from the beginning of life. These recommendations include the simple concept that state systems and services should be centered around meeting the needs of children, and should be provided in a way that parents and caregivers can easily access.

EXISTING LAW

In 2009, California passed Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 80 (Hill), the Bill of Rights for Children and Youth in California to declare that children in California, regardless of culture, race, gender or gender identify, sexual orientation, religion, or disability have the right to a better world than they inherited. This resolution also stated that the state legislature resolved to invest in all children and youth to meet certain goals, including that they:

- 1) have healthy minds, bodies, and spirits that enable them to maximize their potential;
- 2) develop a healthy attachment to a parent, guardian, or caregiver, and an ongoing relationship with a caring and supportive adult;

- 3) have essential needs met, including, but not limited to, nutritious food, shelter, clothing, health care, and accessible transportation;
- 4) have safe and healthy environments, including, but not limited to, homes, schools, neighborhoods, and communities;
- 5) have access to a 21st century education that promotes success in life, in future careers, and a love of lifelong learning;
- 6) have training in life skills that will prepare them to live independently, be self-sufficient, and contribute to their community; have employment opportunities with protections from unfair labor practices;
- 7) have freedom from mistreatment, abuse, and neglect;
- 8) have a voice in matters that affect them; and,
- 9) have a sense of hope for their future.

SUMMARY

While ACR 80 expressed the will of California’s legislative body at the time, no deliberate, comprehensive effort has been made to reflect this will in statute since the resolution’s passage in 2009. Therefore, the most basic needs of California’s children remain unmet to a significant degree.

The Bill of Rights for Children and Youth will establish a comprehensive framework that defines and governs the rights of all children and youth in California, outlines the research-based essential needs of all California’s children, and establishes standards relating to the health, safety, well-being, early childhood and educational opportunities, and familial supports necessary for all children to succeed. It will empower parents to access critical services. Most importantly, it will hold policymakers accountable in ensuring that California’s children are its top priority.

SUPPORT

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CONTACTS