

Testimony to the Mississippi Joint Legislative Task Force on "At Risk"  
Friday, September 14, 2007  
10:00 am

Good morning. I'm Pamela Shaw, Senior Policy Consultant with the Children's Defense Fund, Southern Regional Office headquartered in Jackson, MS. The Children's Defense Fund's Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

CDF provides a strong, effective voice for all the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves.

We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities.

CDF encourages preventive investment before children get sick or into trouble, drop out of school, or suffer family breakdown.

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations. We have never taken government funds.

### **A few Facts about Children in Mississippi**

- ✓ A child in Mississippi is born into poverty every 46 minutes.
- ✓ Mississippi ranks 49<sup>th</sup> among states in per pupil expenditures
- ✓ Mississippi ranks 50<sup>th</sup> among states in the percent of children who are poor. 28.8% of the children in this state are poor

### **Why poverty matters**

Children of poor families:

- ✓ Are particularly at risk of school failure
- ✓ Are read to less often
- ✓ Have fewer books in the home
- ✓ Have a more limited vocabulary
- ✓ Are twice as likely to repeat a grade
- ✓ Are 3.4 times more likely to be expelled from school
- ✓ Are 3.5 times more likely to drop out of high school than are children of wealthier families

**Is there a correlation between poverty, education and economic development? YES!!!!**

Education is an integral and foundational component of economic development. Sustained economic development cannot be achieved without substantial investment in people. Education enriches people's understanding of themselves and world. It improves the quality of their lives and leads to social benefits to individuals and society. Education raises a person's productivity and creativity. It promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances. Education enhances the quality of life for all.

**Why increase funding for at risk students, those students receiving free lunch?**

**It cost more to educate poor children.** If we want to improve as a state we must exercise leadership and courage to do what is right for all citizens. **It cost more to educate poor children.** The *Report of the Commission on Restructuring the Mississippi Adequate Education Program*, states that "the real added cost of serving students from low income families ranges between 50 to 100 percent more than the cost of students without such needs".

Mississippi has historically under funded MAEP. This under funding has compounded the lack of resources in poor communities. What has been created is a very vicious cycle where poorer district get poorer because they need more and they never get what has been promised to them. Legislative leaders must have the courage to invest in the future of all of Mississippi's children. Our children deserve it. We deserve. An investment of increased dollars in at risk is an investment in all of our futures. Let's stop shortchanging our children and ourselves.

I encourage legislative leaders to increase funding to at risk ~~students~~

**We can change the Facts about Children in Mississippi**

- ✓ A child in Mississippi doesn't have to be born into poverty every 46 minutes.
- ✓ Mississippi doesn't have to rank 49<sup>th</sup> among states in per pupil expenditures
- ✓ Mississippi doesn't have to rank 50<sup>th</sup> among states in the percent of children who are poor. 28.8% of the children in this state don't have to be poor.

Real Leadership can change these facts. Increased funding for poorer students is a start.

Thank you.

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