

New York CAN, Oct. 2nd Meeting

“It’s not about money; it is about priorities and the will to make children a priority in this country,” stated Bill Bentley, President and CEO of Voices for America’s Children, our speaker at the October 2nd New York CAN membership meeting, as he encouraged all of us to continue our work on behalf of children. “As a nation we still fail our children in spite of a \$13 trillion economy. We have to champion their cause and become involved in the elections. We have tended to stay out of the fray and lament the results. This is a landmark election and pivotal in terms of what is to come for children; there are opportunities to be found and work to be done.”

There is much we can do during the remainder of this election cycle. We need to press candidates as to what they intend to do for children, and keep pressing them by asking more specific questions to get beyond the rhetoric. He stated that child advocates can not be apologetic, must become more assertive, and put the responsibility back to the legislators to find the money to make children a priority. We have to be clear and united in our demands.

New York CAN has materials to support your efforts. We encourage you to visit the website [Resources](#) page to download fact sheets and questions to ask candidates in A Guide for Reporters. Voices for America’s Children has also provided an opportunity to get active at the federal level on children’s health insurance, an issue that will be taken up within the first 100 days of the new administration. Go to votekids08.org to send a postcard with your support for SCHIP.

Just as we have formed New York CAN at the state level by building a coalition with a broad membership, a Children’s Leadership Council is forming at the national level with many partners whose New York affiliates are CAN partners. This Council will work together in five areas: children’s health, at risk children (those in child welfare and juvenile justice), youth development, economic security and child poverty, and early care and education. The council’s approach will point out successes deserving attention and additional investment. He suggested that New York CAN take a look at immigration issues related to children and to racial and ethnic disparities, two issues percolating at the national level. He ended by encouraging child advocates to run for office.

To learn more about Voices for America’s Children, an organization that has 60 members, many of whom are the Kids Count organizations in their states, you can go to www.voices.org. New York State has three Voices members: Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, a statewide member, Citizen’s Committee for Children in NYC, and Westchester Children’s Association.

We can’t forget that we have made progress in New York State with several wins for children over the last two years. We now have a Children’s Cabinet and increased investments for pre-kindergarten, SCHIP and schools. A Juvenile Justice Task Force has been newly launched and a new Children’s Mental Health Plan has been released. Important changes have been made in the education formula and in child welfare with implementation of a family assessment response and focus on youth aging out of foster care. Several key children’s budget items were protected from

cuts in the first round of budget reductions. We want to protect these gains and work to support implementation.

New York CAN will continue to educate new lawmakers after the election through district visits. We will also communicate with those re-elected to office, the Governor's office, and Children's Cabinet and Advisory Board. Our message: 1) importance of a Children's Budget as a tool for the Children's Cabinet to work together to make decisions regarding cuts in the budget; 2) offering strategic investments which must be held harmless; and offering our expertise as decisions are made. We agreed that cuts should not be made across the board and that costs should not be shifted to local communities.