“The key to the strength, security and success of every community, and of America itself, is families.”

A National Family Platform
Equal Voice for America’s Families
An elderly couple living in a trailer in rural Florida. A single mom from California who has worked for years but has no more today than when she began. A Cambodian refugee facing down gangs. A child in foster care. People with different backgrounds, different concerns, but they have something in common: Their voices have been absent from national discussions about the social and economic realities families face.

The 37 million people - 7.7 million families - who live in poverty are experts on family issues, yet their input has rarely been sought. The Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign - a campaign to elevate the voices of families into the public debate - hopes to change that.

Between October 2007 and September 2008, approximately 30,000 families from diverse backgrounds, often with children in tow, gave up their weekends and evenings to participate in 65 Equal Voice townhall meetings and a national convention held across America. At each townhall meeting, they were inspired, engaged and motivated. They defined poverty as lack of access to living-wage jobs, affordable housing, quality health care and education.

Families conveyed not only a sense of urgency but also their desire to be directly involved in the creation of policies that affect them - to be drivers of change. They let us know that their well-being is not tied to a single issue, that piecemeal solutions have failed to address the complexities of their lives: A family earning a living wage but without health care benefits is no better off than a family surviving on wages just above the poverty level but with Medicaid coverage.

Today, America’s families call on the country, lawmakers and the president of the United States to adopt this National Family Platform and comprehensively address the well-being of families.

On behalf of Marguerite Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs, we thank the families who participated in the Equal Voice campaign. It has been truly an honor to be your partner in this journey. You have been our teachers and our guides in creating a blueprint for change that reflects the hopes and aspirations of families.

America, are you listening?

Luz Vega-Marquis  
President & CEO, Marguerite Casey Foundation

William C. Bell  
President & CEO, Casey Family Programs
As part of Marguerite Casey Foundation’s Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign, several community builders from around the country agreed to “lifecast.” In turning a video camera on themselves, they crossed America’s digital divide. They describe struggles that take place every day across America, yet are so often invisible to mainstream media. For more from the “lifecasts,” go to http://equalvoice.ning.com/

Contents

1 Preamble
4 Our Vision for America
5 Child Care
7 Education
11 Criminal Justice Reform
13 Employment / Job Training
17 Health Care
19 Housing
23 Immigration Reform
25 Safe & Thriving Communities
28 National Call to Action
The National Family Platform of the 2008 Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign is both a document of great triumph and a testament to dire need. It is a triumph in that it represents an unprecedented call to action from - and in behalf of - the full range of America’s working families. It is a testament to dire need in that it reflects the circumstances faced by many of us represented in these pages.

As our nation confronts the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, it is America’s families who continue to shoulder the brunt of the economic and social burden. Even as we watch industries call on the government to rescue them, our voices go unheard. We are not asking for a bailout - we know what it takes to survive. Each day, we, as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters and caregivers, struggle to hold our families and our communities together. But survival is not enough. Because we want our families and communities to thrive, we are calling for the adoption of a national platform that comprehensively addresses the needs of America’s families, and we present the Equal Voice for America’s Families National Family Platform as a blueprint.

The recent economic crisis has shaken the country, but for millions of America’s families the recession means more of the same but with fewer and harder choices:

**The key to the strength, security and success of**

We are asking for a platform that reflects the circumstances faced by many of us represented in these pages. Yet as millions of families across the nation struggle at the breaking point and their numbers swell each day, the truth is clear: The key to the strength, security and success of every community, and of America itself, is families.

Both the Republicans and the Democrats have said as much. Both have called for a front-and-center approach to addressing the concerns of our nation’s most valued - and vulnerable - citizens. In their 2008 platform, Republicans declared that family is “the most powerful influence on a child’s ability to succeed,” while Democrats pledged to “empower families for a new era.”

Statements like these are heartening, but we have learned that words are not enough. We must demand accountability - from ourselves and from those we choose to represent us. To that end, for the first time, America’s families have united to create a platform of our own.

Our platform speaks to the needs of all of America’s families and reflects our shared vision that local and federal policies should support and strengthen families. Our goal is a secure future for all of America’s families.

As working families trying to provide for our families, every minute of our day is accounted for: working multiple jobs to make ends meet, putting food on the table so that our children will grow strong, and watching every dime so that we can provide our families with the basics. Busy with our day to day, there often isn’t enough time to participate in policy debates or advocacy efforts. Yet our voices need to be heard.

**No more.**

We can no longer wait for others to act on behalf of families - we must speak out as families ourselves.

Over the last year, with the help of Marguerite Casey Foundation, we launched the Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign with a common goal of improving the well-being of America’s families.

We came together in small towns and big cities to have our voices heard and to tell our stories about the economic and social challenges our families face. More than 30,000 families came together across race, region and issue to participate in 65 townhall meetings across America.

What we found when we sat with one another and shared our stories and bared our souls was this: We are linked by a shared future and common goals. We are connected by our common bonds as families. We are united.

“We as Americans, we’re better than this. We could do so much more to make things right in America, versus going to other countries and thinking that we can make things right over there before we even touch our own people.”

Corey Camphor, Chicago, Illinois
Pastor, husband, father of four
willingness to come together and work for change.

The voices and stories of these families are the basis for this National Family Platform.

On September 6, 2008, after the Democratic and Republican conventions had packed up and gone home, we came together en masse, in Los Angeles, Chicago and Birmingham, for our own tri-city convention. With the help of modern technology and large-screen simulcasts, we converged, 20,000-strong, to celebrate our united vision and affirm our goals. It was at these conventions that we ratified this platform. Overall, more than 30,000 families participated in the campaign.

Our eight core concerns will come as no surprise. They are the fundamental issues impacting American families: housing, education, health care, child care, criminal justice reform, employment and job training, immigration reform and safe and thriving communities.

The needs of families are universal but too often have been compartmentalized and pushed aside. The advocates and policy makers that we had hoped were fighting for us and alongside of us must often compete with each other for the limited resources available to support our communities. America’s families would be better served if the country adopted a comprehensive approach that addresses our needs as a whole.

Just as a doctor who immunizes patients for polio but not measles leaves a patient and the community at risk, so, too, does narrowly defined policy making and advocacy imperil the strength and future of America’s families. Such singular focus misses the interdependent nature of the basic needs of families. We as families cannot succeed when our needs are cherry-picked and selectively addressed.

When it comes to our families, such oversight is devastating. Even if a family has decent housing, it cannot survive unless the parents make a living wage. A family with adequate income can lose everything if illness strikes a family member without health insurance. Affordable housing loses its luster if our children do not have safe, decent communities.

As our nation welcomes a new administration to the White House, we, America’s families, seek a new kind of relationship, a partnership that combines our active participation with a vigorous, bipartisan emphasis on securing the well-being of our nation’s families. The future of our families, and our nation, depends on it.

It’s time for America to invest in its families.

“every community, and of America itself, is families.”

Roderick Thomas, White Horse, New Mexico
19-year-old who quit school to help support his family

“My 16-year-old said to me last year, she said, ‘Mom, you don’t smile no more.’”

Joyce Cook, Fresno, California
Advocacy worker for Books Not Bars, mother of four

“We are mostly struggling financially right now with a lot of stuff that is needed for us to keep going, like food. It gets really heavy sometimes. For that I try to encourage my brothers to go out, look for a job, get jobs, so that things around here would get a bit lighter.”

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The Equal Voice for America's Families National Platform represents a blueprint for change as heard from more than 30,000 families at 65 townhalls held across the country between October 2007 and September 2008.

These recommendations address policies at the local, state and federal levels; reform at the federal level often negates the need for change at the state and local levels.
Our Vision for America

We envision a nation in which America’s promise of prosperity, security and opportunity is enjoyed by all families, a nation in which all families are nurtured, supported and celebrated, and a nation in which families work together to build a better future for themselves, their communities and their country. We envision an America where equal opportunity translates into equal outcomes.

We envision a future where all families have decent jobs, health care, education opportunities, affordable housing, child care, and safe neighborhoods. We hope for a future where no family has to struggle to meet basic needs such as food and health care.

We Believe

No family should live in poverty.
Prosperity and security begin with every person’s right to work in a well-paid job, to be healthy and educated and to live in a safe community.
Equal opportunity should lead to equality of achievement.
Public policies should promote everyone’s ability to reach their fullest potential and advance the common good.
Families should have an equal voice in shaping policies and the future of their communities.
Society should support family unity, encourage the healthy development of children and youth and foster respect for all people.
Strong families make America stronger.

Our Commitment

We will work for change.
We will work collectively in support of families.
We will protect the rights and opportunities of all families.
We will be involved in our communities.
We will teach our children values and character.
We will support our youth.
We will inform others of the issues we face and what we need to do about them.
We will hold our elected officials accountable to the common good.
Our children are the treasures of our lives. We want the best for them, and we make enormous sacrifices to help them thrive. For those of us struggling to make ends meet, access to good, affordable child care is critical. We are often working more than one job, and we need good care for our children, both those in preschool and those of school age.

**Without affordable child care, we, as working parents, cannot keep our jobs.** Quality care provides a safe learning and social environment and keeps our children out of harm’s way. Child care that offers a safe, stimulating learning environment is an important part of our children’s early education. Those caring for our children need training and professional development in order to help our children grow.

Quality care costs anywhere from $3,000 to $13,000 a year, well beyond the reach of our low- and moderate-income families. Public policies that support affordable quality child care are essential to our well-being as working families. It is especially important that we address federal policy and funding because state policies and funding are varied and unequal, resulting in different standards of health and safety in child care settings.
**LOCAL LEVEL**

**Require Child Care Centers in New Construction**
When public funding is used for local economic development - for example, attracting new development or businesses to a community or helping established businesses grow - we ask local government to require developers to set aside, at low cost, space for a child care center. This will increase the number of child care spaces available in the community and lower the cost to parents.

**Partner With Local Institutions**
We ask our local leaders to join us in encouraging churches, libraries and other community institutions to step forward to provide child care and youth recreation activities.

**Increase State Subsidies for Child Care**
States play a major role in deciding how subsidized child care programs operate. They set income eligibility, the costs to parents and how much child care providers are paid. We ask our state elected officials to secure adequate funding to help our low- and moderate-income families pay for child care, and to ensure that working parents in need of child care are not put on waiting lists.

**Require Training for Child Care Providers**
We encourage states to require formal training programs for those who care for our children.

**Provide Informed Referrals**
We ask our state leaders to help us find and gauge child care providers by funding information and referral services.

**Offer Services to Teen Parents and Immigrants**
We urge states to ensure that teen parents have access to affordable, quality child care. And we ask that all families have access to child care, regardless of immigration status.

**FEDERAL LEVEL**

**Increase Federal Funding for Child Care**
The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the main federal funding source for affordable child care, providing resources to every state to help families pay for child care. We seek increased CCDBG funding. Federal law should include baseline health and safety standards for all child care settings and ensure regular inspections. Funding should be included for the professional development of child care workers in multiple languages and in all child care settings.

**Create a Child Care Tax Deduction**
We urge the adoption of a federal child care tax deduction.
Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime. The goal of the public education system is to equip our children with the skills they need to succeed. It enables them to learn about our country and the world and develop skills that will form the foundation of their working and civic lives. It nurtures their innate curiosity and inspires them to love learning itself.

Beginning in early childhood, education prepares our youth for a lifetime of learning. Each additional level of scholastic attainment makes a significant difference in the wages our children will earn as adults, so access to and affordability of two- and four-year publicly financed colleges help our children tap into the opportunities for financial security that postsecondary education can provide.

Yet, we are not investing nearly enough, especially for those children in most need. In many of our communities, where jobs and affordable housing are in short supply, where basic health care is scarce and local property tax revenues are strained, our public school systems are often lacking. Dilapidated school buildings, inexperienced teachers, and lack of or out-of-date textbooks and computers signal that funding is scarce.

In 2005, school districts with the highest number of poor students received $938 less per pupil than districts with the lowest concentration of poor students. Many students suffer because of sub-par schooling, and many respond to inadequate schooling by leaving school: In 2005, more than 10 percent of Blacks and 22 percent of Latinos between the ages of 16 and 24 were high school dropouts, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics.

We seek increased accountability in public education and early education. We, as parents, must be involved in school decisions and in our children’s education. We urge reform in the way our children are taught so that their skills fit society’s needs. We seek schools that offer bilingual education and culturally relevant curricula for students. Our teenagers crave more recreation, sports, tutoring, literacy and cultural history resources when they get to high school. Technology access and readiness are crucial for all students, regardless of wealth.
LOCAL LEVEL
Reduce Class Sizes
Teachers are better able to meet the needs of all students when classes are smaller.

Promote Community Leadership in Schools
Parents and teachers must come together to work on the best education strategies for our children. Local school districts must provide carefully monitored options for school autonomy to allow our communities to create innovative programs that meet our children’s needs.

Offer Career Preparation
Helping students think about and plan for their future early on will help ensure their success. School districts can help our children by offering career counseling and preparation programs.

Parents and children need to know - preferably by sixth grade - the math, science and language classes required for different career paths so that the children can begin the foundation classes in junior high.

Increased counseling services would increase students’ access to career opportunities, and internships and apprenticeships would provide our children with meaningful work experience.

Provide Sex Education
Comprehensive sex education would benefit all students.

Expand Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Programs
Strong drug and alcohol abuse prevention programs would help students and their families address what might otherwise become a crippling challenge.

STATE LEVEL
Enact Funding Reform
We urge states to provide adequate school funding regardless of local property values.

We call for 1) an end to the practice of outsourcing public school education to for-profit contractors, 2) restrictions on outsourcing to private, nonprofit organizations and 3) regulations that ensure transparency and accountability to our communities.

Focus on Community
We support the creation of “Grow Our Own Teacher” programs that offer tuition and other supports to low-income family members and community activists, so that they can attend state teaching colleges to become fully certified teachers.

Such programs attract teachers who are deeply committed to working in our communities and to staying in hard-to-staff schools. State programs can also support “community schools” that provide basic health, dental and vision screening to all our students and offer extended school-day services to surrounding communities.

End Zero-Tolerance Policies
We urge the replacement of so-called zero-tolerance policies - which criminalize and demoralize our young people - with disciplinary models based on positive behavioral supports.

Strengthen Financial Support for Postsecondary Education
States help low- and moderate-income children attend postsecondary schools through direct funding to public four-year colleges and universities and through financial support to two-year and community colleges. In addition, many states provide financial aid to our children through grants that can supplement federal scholarships. But as state support declines or fails to keep up with rising costs, the costs passed on to our children through tuition increases and fees push public higher education out of reach. We urge strengthened support for postsecondary education and for financial aid for students from low- and moderate-income families.
Reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Those of us in low-income communities seek a new role for the federal government in education, one that strengthens and supports teachers and provides resources so that our schools can provide high-quality programming and services for our children. We seek a federal role that encourages respect for and engagement of families and teachers at education decision-making tables as partners in our children’s success.

Create a National “Grow Our Own Teacher” Program

We urge adoption of a program that recruits and supports parents and other stakeholders in communities of color to become fully certified teachers. Attracting new candidates from our communities into teacher-training programs will help build a profession that is responsive to our needs.

Improve Infrastructure

We support renewal of the nation’s crumbling education infrastructure through school renovation and building campaigns fueled by - us! We, the local, low-income students and residents in neighborhoods across America, offer our services. If you train us, we will build.

Focus on the Public Education System

We are deeply concerned about federal grant programs that divert education dollars to private programs, such as school vouchers and charter schools, at the expense of public school systems. The focus must be on strengthening our public schools so that all children have access to a quality education.

Strengthen the Pell Grant Program

At a time when the cost of college tuition is escalating, the Pell Grant Program, the main federal grant program designed to help low-income students pay for college, continues to be a vital resource for low-income families. Our children - and the adults among us who are returning to school - are taking on more and more debt to attend college. On average, students graduating from four-year colleges owe nearly $20,000. The Pell Grant covers less than $4,500. Funding for Pell Grants should be substantially increased, and financial aid rules should be modified to recognize the needs of our working adults who return to school.

Strengthen College Preparation Programs

The federal government provides funding for two programs - Gear-Up and TRIO - that help our low-income students succeed in college. Services available through high schools and at colleges are designed to serve both our young people making the transition from high school and the older adults among us who go back to college. A better-educated nation is a better nation. We seek strengthened support for Gear-Up and TRIO.

Fund Adult Education Programs

Some federal funding is available to help us improve our English-language skills if English isn’t our first language. Additional funding would help those programs reach deeper into our communities. In addition, we seek an expansion of funding for innovative programs designed to help us as workers enhance our basic skills and qualify for postsecondary education. With better skills, we will be better able to provide for our families.

Provide Student Debt Relief

Given the high level of student-loan debt many of our graduates carry, we seek to have student loan programs reformed to cap loan repayment schedules at a reasonable percentage of the borrower’s income.

San Juan, TX Townhall January 19, 2008
Joyce Cook takes her job as an advocate for California’s incarcerated youth seriously. When she talks about helping families with children behind bars through the Books Not Bars campaign of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, she knows what she’s talking about. Her son, Edjuan, now 24, has been in prison off and on for nearly 10 years. After being released recently from a 10-month stint at San Quentin, he was re-arrested and returned to jail.

What follows are excerpts from Joyce's lifecasts. She worries about her son, employment, housing, education and community safety. She wants to move out of the crime-ridden community of Rodeo in the San Francisco Bay Area, a neighborhood she believes is partly to blame for her son's problems with the law. She also celebrates a major victory: Last summer, in part because of the Books Not Bars campaign, the State of California shut down two remote youth prisons that were ineffective and plagued with inmate abuse.

Joyce Cook

Los Angeles National Family Convention
September 6, 2008

On Criminal Justice Reform
“The prison system has become a business. It’s no longer a form of rehabilitation and education and helping our children and our families. I’m looking for positive results, I’m looking for action, and I’m looking for help.”

On Employment/Job Training
“We can get jobs for our children right here, right here at home base. We don’t have to ship you off to a country where your life’s gonna be in danger. Your life is already in danger in the United States as it is, just living in your neighborhood. We need to be coming in our neighborhoods making those changes. We don’t need to be arming our children with guns and sending them way off to another country at the age of 18. We need to be sending our children to the polls and vote for somebody who’s gonna make a change and make the world a better place.”

On Education
“Education is important - to be proud that your children are doing the right thing. I think that’s something that you want people to know, especially when they are going to be dependent on you to guide them and lead them into a better future.”

On Housing
“I’m trying to move out of Rodeo, me and my family. Edjuan was six or seven years old when he had to hit the sand because there was a shooting up there. It’s time for us to get on up out of Rodeo. Always consider that - where you move and the area you move in and the city you move in can affect your families.”

The material for this profile was adapted from a September 6, 2008, interview by Sara Catania with Joyce Cook as well as from lifecasting and videos on the Marguerite Casey Foundation Web site and an article by Ketaki Gokhale, “Rebirth in Rodeo: A Mother’s Struggle With a Son’s Incarceration,” published July 7, 2008 on the New America Media Web site as part of the Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign. For more from Joyce Cook, go to http://equalvoice.ning.com/
America's incarceration rate is the highest in the world, and the fallout from our broken criminal justice system touches every aspect of our lives, from community safety to employment to housing. Low-income and minority families feel the effects most severely: Ex-offenders - our own brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers - face daunting barriers to employment and re-integration into community life.

Those hurdles contribute to recidivism: Once we get out of prison, federal rules bar us from returning to our families in public housing, and funding for halfway houses and other residential options is limited, leaving us with few options. **We want to be with our families. We want to stay out of prison.** We want to move on with our lives. But to do so, we need more support as we re-enter our communities.

In the short term, we ask for a re-examination of mandatory sentencing laws and strict prison sentences for minor crimes and drug offenses. We favor drug treatment and diversion programs that will help reduce imprisonment rates and the repercussions of incarceration. We urge expanded services while we are in prison, including mental health treatment, education, and workforce development, which would help increase our ability to find jobs once we are released. Eliminating the bans on public assistance based on criminal history would help provide a safety net at the critical moment of our release.

We need long-term policies that improve early childhood education and provide mentoring, after-school programs and employment opportunities for our youth and children. Studies such as the Perry Preschool Project show that early childhood education decreases the likelihood of a child’s ever going to jail.

We urge more help for ex-offenders trying to rebuild, and more support for children of incarcerated parents. We would like it to become easier and less expensive to get criminal records expunged. We believe that voting rights should be reinstated for ex-offenders once we have paid our debt to society.

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**WHAT WE AS FAMILIES PLEDGE TO DO**

We can provide a good example for our children at home, teaching them our values of strength, support and success each day. We can teach them to learn from our mistakes. We can keep a close watch to ensure they are kept from harm and away from gangs and drugs.
LOCAL LEVEL
We ask our local governments to increase funding for community drug treatment, community revitalization efforts, youth programs and ex-offender re-entry programs. Funding is particularly important at this level because our local governments bear the burden of the costs of incarceration through the management of local jails.

Deter Youth From the Criminal Justice System
Prevention is crucial to keeping children from getting caught up in the criminal justice system. Ending zero-tolerance policies in schools would decrease the volume of the school-to-prison pipeline.

STATE LEVEL
We appreciate the crucial role states have played in lifting bans on public assistance for the formerly incarcerated, and we ask that they continue to dismantle this harmful policy. States have flexibility in creating re-entry programs and should do their best to create comprehensive programs that work across agencies to make the transition from prison to the community easier for our loved ones.

Pursue Sentencing Reform
Studies show that the spike in America’s prison population has more to do with changes in the criminal justice system such as mandatory sentencing, three-strikes laws and an increase in adult sentencing for youth rather than an actual increase in crime. More and more of our families suffer through the imprisonment of a parent, spouse, sibling or child in which the punishment is out of proportion in length or harshness to the crime. Such penal policies have resulted in ethnic disparities among the incarcerated and the disenfranchisement of many.

Sentencing reform that focuses on treatment and rehabilitation for our imprisoned family members would curb recidivism, make financial sense and help our communities.

Limit or Eliminate the Lifetime Ban on Public Assistance
The 1996 federal welfare law prohibits anyone convicted of a drug-related felony from receiving federally funded food stamps and cash assistance. States can maintain the federal lifetime ban on cash assistance and food stamps, but they also have the option of passing legislation to limit the ban or eliminate it altogether. Thirty-three states have limited or eliminated the ban.

FEDERAL LEVEL
Ensure Funding for the Second Chance Act
The recent enactment of the Second Chance Act supports $165 million to help former inmates and increase the rate of successful re-entry. This funding must remain secure despite our current economic crisis.

Lift the Lifetime Ban on Public Assistance
The 1996 federal welfare law that prohibits former prisoners - our own mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers - from being eligible to receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or food assistance makes it harder for them to support their families and move on to secure, productive lives.

Increase Funding for Rehabilitation Programs
We know that building prison after prison to house the growing prison population is not a viable solution. We advocate alternatives: We urge funding for research on rehabilitation and re-entry programs and support education, job preparation and post-release planning as well as public and mental health assistance.
We all expect to work hard to make ends meet and achieve our long-term financial goals, but too often our willingness to work hard is not enough. Those among us with limited education or limited English or marketable skills find it difficult to gain stable employment that offers the pay and benefits necessary to support a family.

Many of us lack the education or training we need to get good jobs. More than 40 percent of American workers have only a high school diploma, the equivalent or neither. Another 20 percent of us have some college education but lack an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.

**Education makes a significant difference in what we earn:** Hourly wages for workers lacking a high school diploma or the equivalent are, on average, about 20 percent less than those of workers with a diploma or equivalent. Hourly wages for those of us with an associate’s degree are estimated to be 20 to 30 percent higher than those of workers with only a high school degree. Our workers with four-year college degrees earn almost twice that of our workers with only a high school diploma.

Many of us would like to start our own businesses and grow those businesses so that we can support our families and employ others in our communities. Many of our youth desire to gain employment experience and learn trades, but lack available employment opportunities or training or are not aware of programs that would help them enter the workforce.

Government action at all levels can help us obtain the education and training we need to qualify for better jobs, and help those of us interested in starting our own business or making a business more successful. If we can make a living wage, we will have to work only one job and be able to spend more time with our families. While we provide the labor and strive to better ourselves, day in and day out, we call on our employers to offer a living wage, flexible work hours and health insurance.

We seek a return of manufacturing jobs to this country, the passage of living wage laws, the enforcement of labor laws and the protection of our retirement incomes.
RECOMMENDATIONS

LOCAL LEVEL
Increase Outreach in Low-Income Communities
We urge local government to help low-income communities learn about and apply for job training and education programs and to support programs that teach business skills for those who want to start a business or build an existing one.

Create a Local Minimum Wage
Our working families will benefit greatly from enactment of a local minimum wage and local policy regarding paid sick days.

Generate Support for the Local Economy
Schools and municipal governments that purchase locally produced goods and engage locally based services help our working families succeed.

Improve Local Hiring Laws
Public works projects that hire local workers help keep our communities strong. We urge local hiring requirements in contracts for projects receiving public funding or other public benefits.

Create Green Jobs
Energy-efficient buildings and agencies that promote the use of renewable energy sources help our families stay healthy. Our working families can provide the labor to create those buildings. All we need is the training. We urge our local governments to partner with us as we move into a new, green economy.

STATE LEVEL
As state support for adult education and job training programs declines or fails to keep up with rising costs, increased tuition and fees make public postsecondary education and training less accessible to our low- and moderate-income families. States provide help to low-income adults seeking postsecondary education or job training by providing 1) direct funding to public four-year colleges and universities and to community colleges; 2) financial aid to students; and 3) funding for job training programs and small business startups. We applaud those programs, and we urge expansion of state support for the programs so that more of us can take advantage of them.

Establish a State Minimum Wage
State minimum wage should be equal to a living wage.

Provide Paid Sick Days
Enact state policies that ensure the availability of paid sick days so that we can afford to stay home when we or family members are sick.

Create a State Earned Income Tax Credit
Enact or improve a state Earned Income Tax Credit, and help us spread the word so that everyone who qualifies can benefit.

Develop Community-based Workforce Development Funds
Set aside a portion of federal transportation funds to support community-based workforce development programs that recruit, train and place residents of our underserved communities in jobs and apprenticeships. Require that infrastructure projects receiving those funds target jobs to our low-income residents who are ready, willing and able to work.

FEDERAL LEVEL
Improve Wages and Working Conditions
Congress recently passed legislation raising the minimum wage to $7.25 per hour. Some 13 million of us could see our wages increase as a result. But that increase is not enough: A breadwinner paid at that rate cannot feed a family. Even two adults paid the new minimum wage and working full-time will struggle to support a family of four.

The jobs we work - jobs that keep America’s offices clean, babies cared for, shelves stocked and food supplies flowing - rarely provide paid sick days, either for us as employees or for dependents in need of our care. We urge adoption of the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, under which all workers could be covered and given paid leave.

Reform Labor Laws
For many years, labor unions have been a key driver for improved wages and working conditions for many of us. In recent decades, the share of workers among us represented by unions and benefiting from union-negotiated contracts has fallen, in part because federal labor law does not adequately protect a worker’s right to choose union representation. The law as currently structured also does not adequately protect the ability of a union to negotiate a contract with an employer.

We urge the revision of federal labor laws to ensure that when a majority of workers wish to be represented by a union, we are able to choose that option. It is only right that protection under federal labor laws extends to our most vulnerable laborers, including farm workers and domestic workers. And it is essential that federal labor laws be posted clearly, plainly and in multiple languages to ensure that we as workers know our rights.

It is our hope that the federal government will recognize our value as workers and productive citizens by enforcing labor laws more rigorously and imposing stronger penalties against violators.
**FEDERAL LEVEL**

**Revise the Federal Poverty Line**
For years, economists and poverty experts of all political stripes have dismissed the so-called “federal poverty line” as inaccurate, irrelevant and tragically low. Yet that definition persists, leaving millions of Americans to suffer as a result. On behalf of every man, woman and child seeking a better life, we urge policy makers to revise the current poverty line.

**Protect Income of Workers and Their Families**
As workers with incomes that are insufficient to support our families, we pay an unreasonable share of that income in taxes. We appreciate the relief offered by two federal programs, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit. Unfortunately, nearly half of all families who qualify for those credits are unaware of them or are too confused by the tax forms to take advantage of them. We urge federal agencies to ensure that every family is aware of and given free tax-preparation assistance, if necessary, to take advantage of these credits they so desperately need.

**Promote Local Hiring and Workforce Development**
Each year, billions of federal dollars flow to states for highway, transit and other infrastructure projects. For us, those projects could mean jobs, the kinds of jobs that could lift our families and communities out of poverty. We urge federal lawmakers to require states to target jobs created by these projects to low-income and minority residents in need. We also urge that a portion of the funds passed through to the states be used to support community-based workforce development programs that recruit, train and place low-income residents of disadvantaged communities in those jobs. Of course, we hope to see funding for infrastructure improvements not only in the wealthier parts of towns and cities but in the low-income communities where we live as well.

**Create Green Jobs**
As America moves toward using renewable energy sources, communities are partnering with policy makers in creative ways to bring the benefits of green energy to everyone. We, in our communities, will continue to seek out such partnerships and provide input into how those changes affect our daily lives. We urge policy makers at all levels of government to redouble their efforts to find ways to offset the costs of energy efficiency. We hope to see job training for laborers seeking the skills they need to take advantage of this growing economic force.

**Generate Youth Employment**
If any of the objectives of the Equal Voice for America’s Families National Family Platform are to succeed, we must invest in our youth. What better way to instill in our children the value of work than to put them to work? We must increase funding for summer youth job programs and for employment programs for in-school youth.

**Improve Financial Aid**
Higher education is so costly that few of us can afford to better ourselves without some help from Uncle Sam. Financial aid programs can help working and unemployed people attend college programs that can lead to better-paying jobs, but funding is limited. We urge an increase in overall funding and an increase in financial aid to workers who attend school part-time.

**Increase Funding for Adult Education**
Many of us would benefit greatly from job-training programs that address basic adult education and English as a Second Language (ESL) skills, but funding is limited. We seek expanded funding for innovative programs that help workers enhance basic skills, train for emerging industries, and qualify for post-secondary education.

**Offer Job Training Programs**
Federal funding helps many working adults and those of us who are unemployed attend good-quality education and training programs, either at community colleges or community-based organizations or through labor-union apprenticeships. An increase in federal funding and more focus on programs for low-income workers/communities would provide the opportunity for more of us to gain financial security. We urge support for the creation and promotion of apprenticeship programs for young people making the transition from school to the workforce.

**Help Microenterprise/Small Businesses**
Small businesses are the cornerstone of the American economy. We urge policy makers to increase federal funding to help entrepreneurs in low-income communities create business plans and understand the rules and regulations business owners must follow. Support for training and mentoring and for micro-loans would help us start businesses in our communities.
Myths & Facts About Low-Income Working Families

**Myth** Low-income families do not work.
**Fact** 72% of low-income families work.

**Myth** Low-income families do not work hard.
**Fact** The average annual work effort for low-income working families is 2,552 hours, roughly one and one-quarter full-time jobs.

**Myth** Low-income working families are headed by single parents.
**Fact** 52% of low-income working families are headed by married couples.

**Myth** Low-income working families are headed by immigrants.
**Fact** 69% of low-income working families have only American-born parents.

**Myth** Low-income working families have very young parents.
**Fact** 89% of low-income working families have a parent between the ages of 25 and 54.

**Myth** Low-income working families are overwhelmingly minority.
**Fact** 43% of low-income working families have white, non-Hispanic parents.

**Myth** Low-income working families are dependent on public assistance.
**Fact** 25% of low-income working families receive food stamp assistance.

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**Changed Conditions From 2002 to 2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>2002 Number</th>
<th>2002 Percentage</th>
<th>2006 Number</th>
<th>2006 Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working families below 200% of poverty</td>
<td>9,202,890</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>9,572,450</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in working families below 200% of poverty</td>
<td>20,208,334</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>21,061,465</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working families spend more than a third of income on housing</td>
<td>4,615,876</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>5,537,965</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In working families at least one parent without health insurance</td>
<td>3,382,083</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>3,772,324</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults 25–54 high school degree/GED or less</td>
<td>51,205,868</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>53,615,975</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs paying below poverty threshold</td>
<td>24,702,000</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>29,390,000</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the United States, 47 million of our family members, friends and neighbors lack health insurance. More than 65 percent of us - that is, more than 30 million people - live on a household income below 200 percent of the poverty line. Health care is a human right, but health care costs limit our access to care. Without health insurance, we face financial hardship from even a common illness or injury. Health insurance often does not cover routine procedures, medications, mental health services, alternative healing or necessities such as dental care and prescription glasses.

Even those families among us who do have health insurance do not feel secure. A pre-existing condition that is not covered, a high policy deductible or a copayment for a significant medical problem can result in financial strain or ruin.

Lack of affordable health care and/or affordable insurance, in the end, affects every citizen because the higher costs of last-minute and emergency care are passed on through higher taxes and increased government outlays for stopgap medical care.

Our nation must ensure access to affordable, quality health care for all. We must enact price controls on health care and medicine. We must provide health care education. We must promote healthy living and good nutrition. We must ensure that mental health services are available to all and that the needs of people with disabilities are met. We must improve public programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid, by making them easy to access, simple to apply for and delay-free. We must eliminate barriers to care such as lack of transportation, lack of services in rural areas and on Indian reservations, and lack of language and cultural proficiency between caregivers and care receivers.

If ever there were an issue ripe for direct action, health care is it. We must educate ourselves and our children about proper nutrition and self-care. We must eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly and make sure our children do the same. We must do our part to stay well.
**LOCAL LEVEL**

Require Community Benefits
When community hospitals seek to expand or rebuild, we urge that local governments build community health benefits into contracts involving tax credits or other public incentives. Our local hospitals can, for example, provide free or reduced-cost medical care, transportation services and improved translation and interpreter services.

**STATE LEVEL**

Create Universal Coverage Plans
A few states have passed major health care reform. We urge state governments to identify reforms that might work in their respective states and to enact those rather than wait for federal reform.

Improve Coverage for Low-Wealth Families and Immigrants
States must increase the number of low-income children, adults and immigrants who have health care insurance by expanding Medicaid and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and by making application/enrollment for the programs easier.

Regulate Insurance Premiums and Qualifications
We urge states to limit insurance premium increases and to stop insurance companies from denying coverage to people with pre-existing conditions.

Provide Incentives for Hospitals to Provide Discounted and Free Care
We urge states to strengthen requirements and incentives so that hospitals provide more free and discounted care to low-income communities.

**FEDERAL LEVEL**

Expand the State Children’s Health Insurance Program
The State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) does not cover all of our uninsured children: Only about 4.5 million of our children qualify. We urge the Obama Administration to expand SCHIP to cover all low-income children.

Create a National Health Care Program That Guarantees Affordable, Quality Coverage for All
We seek a federally funded universal health care program that provides every one of us access to affordable, quality health care, including regular well-person checkups. We urge outreach to people in rural areas and on Indian reservations, as well as in inner cities.

We expect that any new system would protect, strengthen and expand the services already available to our low-income families through state Medicaid and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program and to our elderly and disabled through Medicare.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Extend Outreach and Simplify Enrollment
Our health care system should be accessible. Outreach should be emphasized and provided in multiple languages, and enrollment procedures should be streamlined.

Quincy, FL Townhall
May 10, 2008
Safe, stable, environmentally healthy housing is a necessity for the well-being of families. Many of us sacrifice a great deal in exchange for the American dream of a decent home. We may forgo health care, child care, clothing or food to pay the rent or mortgage. Those of us forced to move - and move frequently - in search of work and affordable housing transfer our children from one school to another, which can hurt their social adjustment and academic achievement.

Often, to find affordable housing, we must move farther from our jobs and employment opportunities, increasing commuting time, transportation costs and environmental pollution. Some of us are forced into substandard housing that presents health hazards for our children, including lead poisoning and infestations that cause asthma. Compounding our struggle is the disappearance of public housing.

The lending and foreclosure crisis has shown that foreclosures hurt not only those of us who lose our homes but also our communities as a whole, through lowered property tax revenues, a reduction in home construction jobs and the ripple effect of job and home loss on our community businesses. It also points to the need for sustainable development, affordable housing, and homeownership programs and policies that contribute to the well-being of our neighborhoods and communities.

We all want to feel safe and secure in our homes, to know that we will not be displaced or priced out by development, rising mortgage payments, or gentrification. We call for the renovation of existing public housing, replacement of destroyed public housing, and the construction of safe affordable housing so that we can afford to rent or to purchase a first home.

WHAT WE AS FAMILIES PLEDGE TO DO

We must reach out to our neighbors: Create block clubs, watch teams, street cleaning parties and regular social events to keep our communities safe, clean and neighborly. We must establish close contacts with our community activists and local and state elected officials, and press local leaders to require low-income housing in all new residential development. If our communities are targeted for redevelopment or gentrification, we must work with our neighbors to figure out how we can turn such actions to our advantage, creating opportunity for our families and our communities.

Miami Dade, FL Townhall
April 12, 2008
LOCAL LEVEL

Establish or Expand Housing Trust Funds
Local housing trust funds, when partnered with similar state entities, can focus our city or county resources on affordable housing objectives such as revitalization of our neighborhoods, the creation of mixed-income housing and the establishment of community land trusts. Housing trust funds bring a layer of needed funding and frequently generate support in our communities for critical housing needs and for expanding the capacity of local community development corporations.

Establish Community Land Trusts
Community land trusts acquire vacant land and develop housing on it or acquire land with existing buildings. The land is held permanently by the trust so that it will always benefit the community, while the housing on it can be owned by those of us who use it. We urge that properties developed with public resources be included in a local community land trust to ensure that the units remain affordable to low- and moderate-income residents in perpetuity.

Reclaim Vacant and Abandoned Properties
The loss of manufacturing and other industries, along with rapid suburban growth, has devastated many of our older cities, particularly those in the Northeast and Rust Belt. As housing neglect and abandonment reaches a tipping point, our communities become blighted, creating serious health and safety hazards for those of us who remain. We call on local governments to develop comprehensive policies to quickly secure and reclaim vacant and abandoned properties. We urge that funding be made available to revitalize the areas with affordable housing or to convert them to open space.

Enforce Local Housing Codes and Provide Resources for Repair and Maintenance of Lower-Income Housing
Federal regulations restrict exposure to lead-based paints, and asbestos, and most local codes prohibit health hazards such as peeling paint, leaks, mold and pest infestation, but these codes are erratically enforced. As a result, the health and well-being of our families, and especially our children, can be at risk. To ensure compliance with housing codes, we urge localities to streamline enforcement and adopt strict penalties, including fines, for violations. We also urge the establishment of local funds to eliminate housing-related hazards that threaten our health and safety.

Support Homeownership and Credit Counseling to Promote First-Time Homeownership and to Prevent Foreclosures
Early and immediate counseling and intervention can help our families avoid foreclosures, in particular where we have been victimized by predatory lending practices. Given immediate funding to expand their counseling services, experienced community-based organizations could help turn the foreclosure crisis around and keep families in their homes.

Adopt Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning and Commercial Linkage Policies
Affordable-housing developers must compete (with other developers) for land to construct new affordable units. We urge localities to adopt housing policies that ensure affordable housing is integrated throughout our communities. We support zoning laws that require developers to make a portion of housing units in new residential developments affordable to low- and moderate-income households. Linking the production of affordable housing to private market development will increase the supply of affordable housing and promote equitable distribution throughout our cities and counties.

STATE LEVEL

Establish or Expand Housing Trust Funds
We urge immediate expansion of state-funded programs to create and preserve housing for our low- and moderate-income families. We advocate a structure that will encourage local investment in affordable housing.
R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

FEDERAL LEVEL

Establish a National Housing Trust Fund
We urge the creation of a national housing trust fund with enough revenue to produce and preserve 1.5 million units of affordable housing over the next 10 years. Our top priority is families with the lowest incomes. Funds should be distributed based on matching investments by states and localities. These funds should supplement, not replace, other federal housing programs.

Pursue Foreclosure Prevention
Nearly 1.3 million of the nation's households entered foreclosure in 2007. As many as 3.5 million households are at risk for home foreclosure during the next three years.

The foreclosure crisis has hit low-income families hard. Many of us have lost our homes, often our most valuable asset. Our credit is damaged, hindering our ability to secure alternative housing. Property values in our communities have declined, reducing local tax revenues. Those communities with large numbers of foreclosed properties are suffering the effects of neglect and blight.

Those of us who have avoided foreclosure but who need to sell our homes or tap into our home equity to retire or send a child to college are finding our home values so diminished that we are unable to do much of what we had planned. As our households reduce spending to cover variable-rate mortgage payments, the effects ripple throughout the economy.

We urge the enactment of policies that impose a moratorium on adjustable rate mortgage resets and permit borrowers to refinance into fixed rate mortgages without prepayment penalties. Federal funding for homeownership and credit counseling should be provided to prevent foreclosures whenever possible. We also urge that federal law more strictly regulate the mortgage industry, banning abusive lending practices and imposing strict criminal penalties on violators.

Reinvest in and Expand the Housing Choice Voucher Program
About 1.8 million of our low-income households receive federal housing choice vouchers to help us cover the cost of housing on the private market. However, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that mismanagement in voucher distribution has led to the loss of more than 150,000 vouchers since 2004. We urge federal funding for the renewal of all vouchers in use at their full value and for the reissuing of vouchers that have been lost.

Provide Capital and Operating Resources to Support Public Housing
Many Americans equate the words public housing with the worst living conditions: crime, drugs and inescapable poverty, compounded by a high concentration of families in need. But for many of us with few resources, public housing is the only home we have ever known, and the only home we can afford.

The federal HOPE VI program has revitalized and redeveloped some public housing units, but it has demolished others without providing replacement housing. Since the program’s creation in 1992, many of our neediest families have been displaced. We support continued funding for the program but urge one-to-one replacement of units and state our right, as public housing residents, to return to our homes.

Preserve Project-based Rental Assistance
More than 1.4 million of our households live in homes supported by federally funded project-based rental assistance. That aid subsidizes private-market housing developments, making them affordable to our low-income families and to the elderly (two-thirds of assisted households include an elderly or disabled member). We urge annual renewal of federal appropriations to fund all project-based contracts.

STATE LEVEL

Establish or Expand Rental Subsidy Programs
We know that financing an affordable housing project is a major challenge: In addition to the land purchase and construction expenses, developers must determine whether the project’s income will support its operating expenses over the life of the building, often 30 to 40 years.

States can promote the development of affordable housing for our low- and moderate-income families by 1) providing long-term project-based subsidies to cover operating costs over the life of the project, and 2) providing rental subsidies to us, as tenants, to cover the gap between what we can afford to pay and the rent that must be collected to cover the costs of operating the development.

Invest in Regional Planning and Smart Growth
Just as families can accomplish more when they work together to create a common vision for their community, cities and regions work best when they plan for the future with a comprehensive vision.

The principal goal of regional planning should be the creation of stable mixed-income communities throughout the region. We will all benefit from more equitable and effective schools, sustainable economies in our rural areas, greater affordable-housing opportunities in our suburbs and new incentives for affordable rents and homeownership in our cities. We urge states to require or encourage regional planning and the adoption of local land-use policies that equitably distribute affordable housing.
Corey Camphor

Corey Camphor is many things: pastor, amateur singer, advocate for prisoner re-entry programs on Chicago’s South Side. But the role of which he is most proud is that of father to his three young children. He and his wife, Tiana, grew up in homes without fathers, and both are determined to keep their family together. True, money is tight, but he doesn’t mind making sacrifices for the sake of his family and his community. Camphor rides his bike to work each day because he can’t afford gas. But the daily commute enables him to meet his neighbors and see his community at close range.

For Camphor, a strong community begins at home. He has watched with concern as thousands of apartments in Chicago’s public housing projects have been torn down, their occupants displaced with no home to call their own. And he’s troubled by the racism that still pervades our criminal justice system.

Chicago, IL Townhall
March 29, 2008

On Criminal Justice Reform
“This past weekend I was pulled over by the police. I was dressed down, in my jeans and my T-shirt, and I was driving legally, with my friend that I had just picked up. I’m just frustrated that I was pulled over for no reason. I don’t know if it was because I’m black, but that’s what I’m assuming. Maybe I fit the profile of someone who was up to no good. But the fact of the matter is, I wasn’t speeding, I hadn’t made any illegal turns, nothing. But I guess that’s just the way things are.”

On Housing
“You see a massive migration of black people being moved out, not being able to afford condominiums in the places they once lived. It’s disheartening to know that this is Chicago. Right here on Marquette, we had Martin Luther King doing his march. We fought for equality, yet equality is not being upheld.”

“I realize how blessed we are every day. Looking at the homeless, I realize how blessed we are.”

On Immigration Reform
“The same prejudice and segregation [that happened to Blacks] is happening with the Latino community.” [Homeland Security raids and deportations are turning people into] “criminals just for seeking better opportunities for their families.”

On Safe and Thriving Communities
“You can’t seek [change] outside the community - we have to seek it inside the community, and the basic structure of that community is the family. If we can focus on the family, put that structure back together, then we can see a better future.”
We are a nation of immigrants. No matter how we got here, no matter whether we arrived last century or last week, we came to the United States seeking refuge from intolerance or poverty or both. America embodies the promise of a better future, and we embody America. For centuries, we have shaped and strengthened the United States with our work, our cultures and our hopes for our children.

Today, however, millions of the new immigrants among us work in a shadow world, vulnerable to exploitation. The federal immigration system creates barriers to participation in American democracy, splits up our families and exposes us to harassment as well as dangerous - and sometimes life-threatening - conditions in detention. Our civil liberties are violated when we are denied basic due process and profiled based on our racial or ethnic background. Anti-immigrant policies at all levels of government create an environment of fear that is contrary to everything this nation - our nation - stands for.

We urge the passage of immigration reform and the provision of more opportunities for immigrant families to become citizens so that our contributions can be recognized. We seek the creation of a support system for children whose parents have been deported. We call for the separation of the responsibilities of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the police. We urge the provision of education for our children. We seek permission to carry a state driver’s license. We ask that the immigrants among us be educated about our civil rights.

We must educate ourselves and our friends and relatives as best we can about the laws, rules and regulations pertaining to immigration and learn the social and cultural norms of our adopted country and follow them. We must pay taxes and, when we can, support the American economy - and our own dreams - by buying homes. Recent studies show that undocumented workers are keeping up with mortgage payments.
End Racial Profiling
We urge the passage of measures that ban racial profiling and emphasize the role of local law enforcement to protect public safety rather than to enforce federal immigration law.

STATE LEVEL

Permit Driver Licensing
State and federal laws combine to make it impossible for the undocumented immigrants among us to obtain a driver’s license, which creates public safety risks and increases the cost of insurance for everyone. States can develop practical solutions, including removing barriers to obtaining drivers’ licenses imposed by the federal REAL ID law, solutions that will allow us, regardless of our status, to work and drive safely.

Provide In-State Tuition
Ten states allow undocumented immigrant children who have grown up in the United States and attended American schools to qualify for in-state tuition. For many of us, that cost savings enables our children to go to college. We urge states to adopt in-state tuition policies for undocumented immigrant children who reside within the state.

Support Services for Civic Engagement
All of us strive to be better citizens. We advocate increased resources for English language and civics education classes for immigrants, citizens with limited English proficiency and those interested in naturalizing to become American citizens.

LOCAL LEVEL

Encourage Noncooperation With Federal Immigration Authorities
We urge police departments and local governments to adopt policies to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement authorities only in very narrow and specific circumstances, leaving immigration enforcement to the federal government.

FEDERAL LEVEL

Strengthen Pathways to Citizenship
As many as 12 million undocumented immigrants live and work in the United States. Some of us have lived here for many years. We urge creation of a path to citizenship that would help keep track of who is in the country, ensure that we as immigrants are protected by the same labor laws that protect citizens, and allow us to contribute fully to our communities and the nation. The citizenship process should be streamlined and simplified, and the fees should be substantially reduced. During the citizenship process, our families should be allowed to work and protected from deportation.

Support Immigrant Children – The Dream Act
Federal law allows all our children to attend public schools, regardless of their immigration status, but local governments have sometimes tried to control immigration by checking our documents as parents or those of our immigrant children. Such illegal action creates a climate of fear in our schools and in our communities. Federal authorities should ensure that all children have access to schools.

Discourage Raids
In the last two years, the Department of Homeland Security has increased immigration enforcement raids on our worksites and in our communities. As immigrants, we live in fear of being separated from our families. We are vulnerable to employer exploitation and are often mistreated while being held after a raid. We call on the Department of Homeland Security to halt the use of raids until Congress enacts an immigration reform bill that resolves our fate. We urge the enforcement of existing worker protections to prevent exploitation.

Remove Border Wall
The wall that is rising between the United States and Mexico is a symbol of the failure of our current immigration policy. We seek an end to funding for the construction of the border wall, and the beginning of a sane and reasonable strategy on immigration.

Pursue Immigrant Integration
As immigrants, we attempt to assimilate and succeed in the United States by learning English, by naturalizing to become citizens and by participating fully in the life of our communities, including voting. We seek increased resources for English literacy and civics education in local communities and seek the end of naturalization backlogs.

Revamp Detention and Internment
We seek laws creating ethical standards of treatment and protections for our families in detention proceedings, and the creation of alternatives to detention that respect our dignity and our ties to the communities in which we live.

Support Immigrant Children – The Dream Act
Federal law allows all our children to attend public schools, regardless of their immigration status, but local governments have sometimes tried to control immigration by checking our documents as parents or those of our immigrant children. Such illegal action creates a climate of fear in our schools and in our communities. Federal authorities should ensure that all children have access to schools.

Tens of thousands of our children are brought to the United States, sometimes as infants, without documentation. As adults, they are unable to get jobs, attend college or otherwise contribute to our country, regardless of their talents. We seek legislation that allows our young people to attend college as a way to earn legal status.

RECOMMENDATIONS

April 12, 2008
Oakland, CA Townhall

SPANISH

Recommendations

ISSUES

Materialism values in the US:

Lack of affordable homes:

Mental Health problems:

Solutions to these:

- Education:

- Affordable housing:

- Health Care:

- Employment:

- Social Security:

- Immigration Reform:

- Education:

- Affordable housing:

- Health Care:

- Employment:

- Social Security:

- Immigration Reform:

- Education:

- Affordable housing:

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- Social Security:

- Immigration Reform:

- Education:

- Affordable housing:

- Health Car
It takes a village to raise a child, the saying goes, and we as parents and caregivers know this to be true. We are proud of our children and of the sacrifices we have made to see them grow. We want our children to be everything that we are, to model our values and our work ethic, and we want them to be more, to succeed where we have struggled. **We know our children cannot succeed unless our “villages” - our neighborhoods and our communities - are safe and thriving.**

In some of our older, more rooted neighborhoods, we make up for what we lack in financial wealth with our deep bonds among neighbors and friends. We are good at telling one another’s stories, the stories of our communities. These stories help us know ourselves and help make us strong. But as the populations change, these stories get lost; many of our communities are newer, and neighbors are less familiar. We must build and maintain bonds that will keep us all safe and secure.

We envision communities that are free of drugs, where children feel safe in their schools and the elderly are secure in their homes. We acknowledge that drug and alcohol abuse damage our communities, and we seek help in overcoming our addictions. We seek positive interactions with the police, and partnerships to pursue our shared goal of safe and thriving communities.

We see our youth yearning for support and companionship. We strive to offer them career help and activities in the summer and after school so that they will not be drawn into gangs and violence. We know that clean, well-maintained parks and play grounds will help our communities stay secure and strong, as will good networks of public transportation that get us to school and work.
**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**LOCAL LEVEL**

**Expand Parks and Open Space**
Fund the transition of vacant lots into parks or green space, particularly in underserved areas.

**Support Accessible Retail Options**
Provide meaningful incentives for the development of quality, affordable retail businesses in low-income communities.

**Provide Drug and Alcohol Treatment Programs**
Improve funding and access to drug and alcohol treatment programs.

**State Level**

**Fund Small Business Startups**
Provide seed money and support for entrepreneurs to open banks, supermarkets and other businesses offering essential services in low-income communities.

**Improve Public Transportation**
Increase funding for public transportation. Develop new public transportation services and expansion of existing routes for low-income, transit dependent families seeking access to jobs.

**Transform Brownspace Into Open Space**
Provide funding for cleanup and preservation of large tracts of unused or abandoned lands.

**Federal Level**

**Invest in Infrastructure**
Improve federal funding for transportation, particularly public transportation, school reconstruction and other infrastructure projects that can revitalize low-income communities and provide jobs to residents.

**Reduce Pollution Exposure**
Fund alternative sources of energy, and move major polluters away from populated areas.

**Enact Gun Control**
Strengthen and enforce gun control legislation, focusing, in particular, on hand guns.

**Encourage Community Policing Initiatives**
Implement or strengthen community policing initiatives.

**Provide Drug and Alcohol Treatment Programs**
Improve funding and access to drug and alcohol treatment programs.

**Provide Small Business Startups**
Provide seed money and support for entrepreneurs to open banks, supermarkets and other businesses offering essential services in low-income communities.

**Strengthen Gun Control**
Strengthen and enforce gun control legislation, particularly for hand guns.
Roderick Thomas is the third of three lifecasters profiled in our platform for America’s families.

Roderick Thomas is only 19, but he already carries the burdens of a man. He worries about finding a job and about the needs of his mother and five younger siblings in the Navajo community of White Horse, New Mexico. He used to take out his frustrations by drinking, abusing drugs and fighting. Now he pours his concerns into elaborately decorated notebooks. “We sometimes go three or four days without food,” one entry reports. “Starving, my little brothers and sisters cry.”

At one point Roderick went to California to work in a UPS store. He was able to send $5,000 home. But a family emergency required him to return. Now he focuses on looking for work, on keeping his family together, and on keeping his younger siblings fed.

When Roderick attended an Equal Voice townhall meeting last summer, it was his first experience with community building. In fact, it was the first time he had been in the presence of his tribal elders, an event that both awed and inspired him. When the moderator asked participants to suggest ways to improve themselves and their lives, Roderick raised his hand. To his surprise, the group acknowledged and incorporated his suggestion.

On Criminal Justice Reform
“People get trapped real quick. Good people. I was really hooked on drugs, and I really didn’t care about anything.” “Some friends I met in California at a [Navajo] ceremony, they bailed me out and invited me to live with them under their roof to get on my feet. I learned a lot out there on my own. Got my own house, my own job. Went to school there, got my GED there. Used to be I was getting into trouble until I started staying productive, until I started self-disciplining myself. I learned that you can stay out of trouble that way.”

On Safe and Thriving Communities
“Productive is my word. You got to stay productive, and if you’re staying productive, you feel good at the end of the day. I was surprised that they actually voted on my word. They actually voted on what I had to say. I never got to speak to people, a group of people. That’s what I never had. Yesterday was my first time. It was crazy. I was kind of shy and choking. I never met tribal leaders. I actually got to get near one. Here I was sitting next to them. That felt really good. I felt like one of them.”

The material for this profile was adapted from lifecasting and videos on the Marguerite Casey Foundation Web site and an article by Kenneth Kim, “Strength, Resilience and Tradition: Native Family Battles Desert, Poverty for Survival,” published June 7, 2008, on the New America Media Web site as part of the Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign. For more from Roderick Thomas, go to http://equalvoice.ning.com/
National Call to Action

Because families are the backbone of our nation, we call on the president of the United States, on lawmakers at all levels of government and on ourselves to adopt this National Family Platform.

No family should live in poverty. Every person in America should be able to fulfill his or her potential. When we work hard, we should be able to advance and participate fully in the economic, political and cultural life of our nation. Economic status, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality do not predetermine our potential or our achievements.

We take responsibility for ourselves, for our neighbors and for contributing to a better society. We are working to create change and will hold everyone in our communities accountable. We call on our nation to join us in supporting America’s families.

We seek comprehensive policy reform to safeguard America’s families and call on policy makers to:

Lead a national dialogue on family policy
The country must re-evaluate how it regards its families. Society and all levels of government must rethink attitudes about poverty, accurately assess the current state of America’s families, and change how policies that affect families are determined.

Listen to the voices of families
Families must ensure that we are part of the national discussion. It’s time to listen to those of us who are living the core concerns that drive a family-first policy agenda.

Adopt our national family platform
We seek across-the-board policies that address the full range of our core concerns. Our lives are not single-issue.

We can no longer survive on piecemeal solutions.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the more than 30,000 families who participated in the Equal Voice for America’s Families

Special thanks to our Board of Directors, whose leadership, support and ongoing commitment to improving the economic well-being of families contributed to the success of the Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign.

Freeman Hrabowski III (Chair)
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Lynn Hunley
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A special thanks to our grantees and partnering organizations that joined together to build a family-led movement. Without your guidance, participation and deep community roots and commitment to families, this campaign would not have been possible.

Arkansas
Advocates for Community and Rural Education, and Arkansas Public Policy Panel

California

Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama, Greater Birmingham Ministries, Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama, and Voices for Alabama’s Children

Arizona
Border Action Network, Campesinos Sin Fronteras, Chicanos Por La Causa, Dine Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment, Hopi Foundation, Mariposa Community Health Center, Southwest Center for Economic Integrity, Tewa Women United, Tohono O’odham Community Action, Tonatciera, Tucson Children’s Museum, and Tucson Indian Center

Florida
Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Direct Action and Research Training Center, Farmworker Association of Florida, Farmworkers Self-Help, Miami Workers Center, North Florida Educational Development Corporation, and Sant La Haitian Neighborhood Center

Georgia

To the Casey Family Programs CEO and President William C. Bell for his leadership and ongoing support of the campaign.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

campaign and contributed to the creation of a national family platform that puts families first.

Thanks to you, the voices of America’s families are being heard.

Georgia Living Wage Coalition, Georgia Stand Up, Newtown Florist Club, Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide, Southern Center for Human Rights, Southern Education Foundation, Southern Partners Fund and Southern Regional Council

Illinois

Louisiana
Families & Friends of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children, Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, Louisiana Children’s Museum, Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation, Louisiana Environmental Action Network, Louisiana Justice Institute, People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, Safe Streets/Strong Communities, and Southern Mutual Help Association

Mississippi
Action Communication and Education Reform, Citizens for a Better Greenville, Community Culture and Resource Center, Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County, Mississippi Low-Income Childcare Initiative, Mississippi Workers’ Center for Human Rights, Nollie’s Citizens for Quality Education, Parents for Public Schools, Quitman County Development Organization, Southern Echo, Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative, Sunflower County Parents & Students, and Youth Innovation Movement Solutions

New Mexico
Americans for Indian Opportunity, Colónias Development Council, Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, Institute of American Indian Arts, National Indian Youth Leadership Project, New Mexico Aequita Association, Somos Un Pueblo Unido, Southwest Organizing Project, Tewa Women United, and United South Broadway Corporation

Texas
Adults and Youth United Development Association, ARISE Support Center, AVANCE Inc. Rio Grande Valley Chapter, Azteca Community Loan Fund, Brownsville Community Health Center, Casa de Proyecto Libertad, Colónias Unidas, Community Action Council of South Texas, La Union de Pueblo Entero, Proyecto Azteca, Proyecto Digna, Serving Children and Adolescents in Need, Southwest Workers’ Union, START Center, Su Casa de Esperanza

Washington
American Friends Service Committee, CASA Latina, Children’s Alliance, Church Council of Greater Seattle, Coalition to Undo Racism Everywhere, Columbia Legal Services, Comite Pro-Amnistía General y Justicia Social, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice, Community Schools Collaboration, Community to Community Development, Diocese of Yakima Housing Services, Justice Alliance Education Fund, KYRA-LP Thin-Air Community Radio, Latino/a Educational Achievement Project, Legacy of Equality Leadership and Organizing, Lummi Cedar Project, Minority Executive Directors Coalition of King County, Nonprofit Assistance Center, Odyssey Youth Center, OneAmerica, Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane, Potlatch Fund, Powerful Voices, Refugee Federation Service Center, Refugee Womens Alliance, Safe Futures Youth Center, Seattle Young People’s Project, Social Justice Fund Northwest, Southwest Youth & Family Services, Statewide Poverty Action Network, United Indians of All Tribes Foundation, Village of Hope, VOICES for Opportunities Income Childcare Education and Support, Washington Community Action Network Education and Research Fund, Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition, Wing Luke Asian Museum, and Yakima Interfaith Coalition

National

September 6
Birmingham, AL

September 6
Los Angeles, CA

September 6
Chicago, IL

April 19
Camden, AR

April 19
Stockton, CA

April 19
San Antonio, TX

April 19
Los Angeles, CA

April 19
Long Beach, CA

April 22
Indianola, MS

April 19
San Rafael, CA

April 19
Stockton, CA

April 22
Indianola, MS

April 26
Seattle, WA

April 26
San Diego, CA

April 26
Pine Bluff, AR

April 26
Flagstaff, AZ

April 26
Hattiesburg, WA

April 26
Frances, CA

April 26
Chicago, IL

April 26
Mobile, AL

April 26
Gonzales, MS

April 30
Santa Fe, NM

May 3
Phoenix, AZ

May 10
Albuquerque, NM

May 12
Seattle, WA

May 13
Shasta/Redding, CA

May 14
Santa Ana, CA

May 17
Jackson, MS

May 17
Santa Ana, CA

May 17
Spokane, WA

May 29
Los Angeles, CA

May 31
Brownsville, TX

May 31
Los Angeles, CA