

Voter Education: Supervisor Candidates Offer Views on Child Care

In June, voters in the Second Supervisorial District will choose the person to fill the post being vacated by the retirement of Yvonne B. Burke. It's a high stakes position that could significantly reshape the region's longtime political power base.

The candidates running are: Martin Luther King Aubrey, Antonio Alvarez, Delaney Smith, Jr., Bernard C. Parks, Florian Thompson, Mark Ridley-Thomas, Thomas Neusom, Drew Fenton, and Morris Griffin.

Crystal Stairs contacted the candidates on their positions on child care and working families. Three responded to our calls. Their full responses are below:

Question 1

Research indicates that investing in early education programs results in huge benefits in long term costs to the community - in health care, worker attendance and productivity, and public safety expenses among other factors. [What is your history on issues of child care and early care and education policy? AND what commitment of resources can we expect from you in support of quality child care and early care and education?](#)

Question 2

Social programs that impact quality of life outcomes for children are being severely impacted by recent (and foreseeable) budgetary restraints. In a climate of increasing needs and declining resources – [how will you make sure that policy, practice and funding match the verbal claims for commitment to better outcomes for children in Los Angeles County?](#)

Question 3

The Department of Public Social Services reports that CalWORKs caseloads have declined by 47% since 1996, while the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy recently reported that 60% of working families still live in poverty. [How will you ensure that these families receive policy attention?](#)

Dr. Delaney Smith, Jr. Pharm.D., M.D.

[Question 1](#)

My history on the issue of early child care, early care is quite personal in that I began an early childcare program that was an educational "nursery school" before the term preschool had come into wide usage. As a result of that experience I had essentially completed kindergarten, before I was five years old, and I had such an advantage that the teachers asked my parents not to teach me anything else...."at home". I skipped a portion of the third grade through a double promotion.

I had an extensive education in the field of Pharmacy, a B.S., Doctorate in Pharmacy, with the completion of a post graduate residency in Clinical Pharmacy. I later received a Doctorate in Medicine and thereafter completed three additional years in post graduate education [total of 4 years of post -doctoral studies in the areas of Pharmacy and Medicine]. I created the first urgent care center in Los Angeles in 1983, whereby family medicine and pediatrics was a significant part of my medical practice. I am quite family of role that early education roles can play as described above, and needless to say I am a big supporter of early education programs, and I would commit substantial resources, in the early development programs for our youth such as "crystal stairs" as children are our most important resource!

Question 2

There is considerable waste in government spending. Areas of waste that I would specifically target, that would create an opportunity to redirect such allocations to vital programs in education and healthcare would begin with the education Los Angeles county social workers and Los Angeles County counsel that state and federal law such as the most recent... Federal Kinship Caregiver Act requires that DCFS make real attempts to preferentially place children with family members. Federal incentives for removing children from families in return for federal allocations at profit to counties must be eliminated, in what one newspaper has described as a "cash for kids scheme", in which Los Angeles County is number ONE in the nation. In 2006 there were 76,000 children in foster care in Los Angeles County alone, and it is estimated that 50% of which could have remained in their families with a responsible, willing family member, especially with the assistance of organizations such as "crystal stairs". The alternative to assisting family members with foster care is the present system, whereby following dismemberment from their families federal allocations to counties are as much as \$80,000.00/child with proportionately very little finding it's way to childcare agencies. With needed reductions in inappropriate foster care placements, more money could be available for childcare assistance to families in need, and childcare agencies could be better funded for the valued services performed.

There are other areas of waste, for instance instead of costly incarcerations, the emphasis should on medical treatment and rehabilitation of drug users, and those with psychiatric illness for which prisons now serve as a revolving door at a cost to taxpayers of as much as \$100,000.00 / year. The savings could be redirected to vital, worth while programs such as "crystal stairs" which enables rehabilitated citizens, many of whom are parents.... to obtain an education, and to work as productive citizens, who are earning their way in society. Working young parents who are rewarded for their time with a "paycheck" are less likely to be involved in gangs and idle street activities.

Question 3

I would ensure that working families which are impoverished... are protected by legislation, that supports policies that favor financial support for agencies that are needed to support children and their families that are poor...by working with such Foster Care Reform advocates, Speaker Elect Assemblywoman Karen Bass and others. I have personal experience in affecting positive change at DCFS. On June 22, 2006 I was personally involved in the removal of the first case in history, from state court [Children's Court in LA] to federal court. Ultimately, the state court judge, and even Los Angeles County counsel as counsel for DCFS, were removed from involvement in the case as DCFS had to hire private counsel due to various improprieties that violated the Constitutional rights of the accused parties and done so without supporting evidence of intention injury to the child. My writings as a forensic expert drew attention concerning the extent of wrongful, inappropriate foster placements... which directly resulted in additional training in sensitivity, ethics, and current law for social workers, as it relates to required preferential placement with families.

Poor reimbursement to agencies is a problem that must be remedied, to assure that parents can allowed to obtain higher levels of education, and return to the work force, with the satisfaction that their children are benefiting from well funded child care programs, such as "Crystal Stairs" as many social workers support my position and effort toward reform at the Children's Court in Monterey Park, a battle that continues to the present time.

State Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas

Question 1

I am consistently committed to supporting early education and child care programs throughout Los Angeles and the State. The districts and communities I have represented are challenged with

many social and economic circumstances. Early education provides an opportunity for children to have access to high quality child care programs, while families can benefit from subsidized child care programs to help them work or complete their education.

I have represented in various elected capacities. In my work throughout the State Assembly and Senate, I have consistently supported legislation that would improve the quality of early education. I have also supported funding that would expand and sustain a variety of programs. During my tenure on the Los Angeles City Council, I created education and intervention programming for middle school students.

I have opposed budget cuts to the early education and child care programs that have been proposed since my service in Legislature.

I have supported efforts, such as Universal Preschool that help expand services and will improve the access to high quality programs.

Last year, I authored legislation to support the efforts to help child care providers work with children with special needs. SB 680 was intended to provide training and support to providers, so that they are better equipped and confident about serving children with special needs. This helps supports parents of children with special needs who often experiencing barriers in securing high quality child care services with providers who are trained to work with children with special needs.

Question 2

There are a several ways in which I will make sure that all of us work together to achieve better outcomes for children in Los Angeles County. The hallmark of my career as a legislator has been based on empowerment. I believe the success of programs and services is based on being able to develop broad range partnerships across many different areas and experiences.

The County of Los Angeles is large and services millions of people and its multitude of departments, commissions, and service providers all are critical to the development and implementation of policies that best serve children and their families. My role is to ensure that there is a cohesive and coordinated delivery system that maximizes current resources, is effective in serving children and families, and that I am an advocate in ensuring our critical programs are adequately funded.

My leadership will ensure that we are accountable to the people we serve by educating them about the services they can access, engaging them in a process that solicits their feedback on any concerns or successes with programs they use, and empowering them by giving them the tools and avenues for them to advocate for their families and children.

Question 3

Welfare to work programs are currently under a lot of scrutiny at the federal level. I am fully aware of the possible financial penalties that we could incur as a result of federal pressure to increase the work participation rates. I will work on this issue from several fronts:

- Support and insist that federal guidelines provide counties with maximum flexibility to deal with unique and challenging circumstances that keep people from participating in their welfare to work plans.
- Ensuring that safety nets given to families are preserved and supported.
- Child Care is a key supportive service to CalWORKs families. I will ensure that child care, as well as other supportive services are adequately supported and funded.
- I will review and support proposals that reduce administrative and policy barriers that compromise welfare to work participation rates in the County. I would work to change when necessary, policies at the local and State level that restrict clients from accessing and participating in job training, educational, or work.

- Help reduce administrative burdens that include State and Federal reporting requirements

Los Angeles City Councilman Bernard Parks

Question 1

From a public resources standpoint and for the overall quality of life of a community, the very best investment we can make is in child care and early childhood education. That is documented most recently by “A Step Up, But Not Out” report prepared for Crystal Stairs and by various reports of the First 5 California Children and Families Commission. If I learned anything as a police officer for nearly forty years, it is that an arrest of a juvenile more often than not illustrates a failure in a social service system that spends far more to incarcerate than to educate and prevent. Recent studies show, for example, that it costs \$44,000 a year to keep a gang member convicted of a crime in state prison and \$3,000 a year to keep a youngster out of a gang in the first place. Without a doubt, the numbers for a positive investment in services at the very earliest age for children, and especially those born to poverty, are even more dramatic. As Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department and as a Member of the City Council, I have strongly supported services and programs oriented to children and as a Supervisor I will have even more opportunity to do so given the various departments that relate to children’s services as well as the work of the First 5 Commission.

Question 2

The best way to assure priority funding for priority programs is through the adoption of Financial Policies that guide budget decisions from year to year, especially in times of fiscal constraints. As Chair of the City Council Budget & Finance Committee, I have done that for the City of Los Angeles. Under the City’s Financial Policies, for example, 15% of the LAPD’s budget must be spent on crime prevention programs, and other priorities are similarly laid out. I will do the same as a Supervisor, and certainly child care and related services are priorities that must be recognized and honored when budget times are tough. Matching funds to commitments is best done through the adoption of policies that do not permit decision-makers to renege.

Question 3

Again, “A Step Up, But Not Out” makes the compelling case that ending welfare does not mean ending poverty. Given the demographics of the Second Supervisorial District, attacking unemployment has to be a very high priority, but addressing the needs of the working poor is close to it. The first step in addressing that problem is to acknowledge that it exists, which I certainly do, based on my experience as a police officer and my experience as a Council Member. In my judgment, while assuring that a supportive safety net exists to provide essential services, including child-related services, to these families, we simply must aggressively pursue economic development opportunities and the opportunities that development can offer to escape the confinement of poverty-level jobs.

For information on all candidates and contests on the June 3 ballot, go to www.smartvoter.org/2008/06/03/ca/la