



November 15, 2009

## Leaders have an obligation to ensure children's well-being

The Westchester Children's Association is an independent, nonpartisan child advocacy organization that has been a leading voice for the county's children and youth since 1914. We congratulate all the winners in the Nov. 3 elections and applaud their willingness to serve the public.

Whatever their party affiliation or political philosophy, each of these newly elected public officials shares a responsibility to make government work for the residents of Westchester County. About one-quarter of those residents are children younger than the age of 18.

On a number of measures, our children are not doing as well as our overall population. For example, from 2007 to 2008, the number of Westchester children living below the federal poverty level — about \$22,000 for a family of four — increased by more than 3 percentage points, from 8.7 percent to 11.8 percent, while the overall poverty rate grew by less than 1 percentage point.

This means that 26,635 of our children live in families that struggle to make ends meet in one of the wealthiest and most expensive counties in the country. And many experts predict that the figures for 2009 will be even worse. Of course, many children are doing well, but the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is startling. According to the 2007 American Community Survey, the median income for a two-parent family with children younger than 18 was \$134,656, while the median for single moms was just \$29,330.

Government plays an important role in protecting children and ensuring their healthy development. In our county, about 25 percent of children younger than 19 rely on public health insurance options to get the health care they need. When families are unable to safely care for their children, government steps in to protect them. In 2008, there were 5,849 reports of child abuse or neglect, up from 5,334 in 2007. Each of these reports must be thoroughly investigated and evaluated by our government to make sure children are safe and well-cared-for.

Children do best when all the adults who share responsibility for their welfare work together. The Westchester Children's Association looks forward to continuing our collaboration with elected officials, public and nonprofit agencies, community leaders and child advocates to make sure that all our children are healthy, safe and prepared for life's challenges.

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