

Family Living

Children's Sabbath

BY-MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

This year, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is celebrating 25 years of research, public education, policy development, and advocacy for children. We are also celebrating our seventh year of promotion of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths celebrated each year in thousands of faith communities nationwide during the third weekend of October.

I'm asking you to join with us this year on October 16-18, 1998. Ask your church, mosque, or synagogue to devote one day a year to children, and then to follow up with action throughout the year to Leave No Child Behind. This observance begins with services in synagogues and mosques on Friday evening and concludes with services in churches and interfaith celebrations in communities throughout the country on Sunday. Congregations focus prayer, educational opportunities, community outreach, and advocacy initiatives on the needs of children and commit to help meet those needs.

Since Children's Sabbaths began, thousands of congregations and religious groups have joined this movement, which is currently endorsed by over 200 religious denominations and organizations. By last year, 50,000 congregations had joined in solidarity to provide a strong moral witness in response to the needs of this nation's children.

Children's Sabbaths have a theme each year. Last year we lifted up the needs of our children for health care. This year, we are focusing on another essential need: to nurture, love, protect, and care for children by pro-

viding affordable, quality child care and after-school programs. This year's theme, "Gifted and Called to Raise Up Our Children," reminds us of our responsibility to use and share our giftedness to ensure that every child receives the care he or she needs to grow and develop to their God-given potential.

Everyday in this country, 13 million preschoolers—including 6 million infants and toddlers—are in child care. Every day in this rich country, five million children are left home alone after school because too many parents simply cannot find quality child care they can afford.

This year CDF is engaged in "Child Care Now!"—a national campaign to improve the quality and affordability of child care and after-school activities for America's children and families.

We are urging communities of faith to join thousands of national, state, and local organizations and individuals in the crucial effort.

Many congregations have worked diligently to provide for the physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs of our children.

Through solemn promises we make to children and to God in a baby naming, baptism or infant dedication, through rites of initiation and passage such as first communions and confirmations, through religious education and social, cultural, and recreational activities, the religious community seeks to live out its call to nurture children.

Many congregations have also taken seriously the opportunity and responsibility to care for children in programs without explicit religious content, expressing their faith by providing safe, developmentally appropriate child care for children, as well

as after-school, weekend, and summer programs for school-age children. In fact, congregations are the single largest provider of center-based child care.

For all these reasons and more, the religious community is a vital voice that must be heard in the "Child Care Now!" campaign.

It can speak with moral authority and experience because of its long tradition of nurturing children, its commitment to justice, and its experience in providing child care, after-school, and summer programs and supporting parents in raising their children.

Each year CDF publishes a Children's Sabbath manual that provides valuable information and practical suggestions about how your religious community can participate.

The manual includes suggested prayers, hymns, sermons, homilies, lesson plans for children, appropriate references from the Bible, the Torah, and the Koran, as well as how-to sections for organizing, communicating with the media, and advocating for children at the local, state, and national level. You can obtain copies of our Children's Sabbaths manuals by writing to CDF Religious Affairs Division, 25 E Street NW, Washington D.C. 20001, or calling 202-662-3589.

Mother Teresa said, "Love cannot remain by itself; it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action and that action is service." Won't you join with us this year in service, prayer, and advocacy for children? Share your gifts and lift your voices to God, to each other, and to the leaders of our national until not one child is left behind, hurt, or abandoned, and every child flourishes as God intends.

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

You wouldn't leave your house without ensuring that your child care needs are satisfied, would you? Well, we need to make sure that Congress doesn't leave the House of Representatives and the Senate without making sure America's child care needs are satisfied.

This is an election year. Congress will be coming back to Washington after the summer recess, but they'll be focused on adjourning early and getting back to their states as quickly as possible to campaign for re-election. They need to hear our voices. They need to know that we don't want to see them back home until they've taken care of important business for children and working parents.

Spread the word in your community: we're asking all children's programs, day care homes and centers, summer camps, libraries, religious congregations, community center, and children's advocates to create hand-drawn banners, posters, and pictures including the message "Act Now! We Need Quality Child Care and Safe After School Activities!" on each drawing. Mail them to the Children's Defense Fund "Child Care Now!" at 25 E. Street NW, Washington, DC 20001. We will be holding a national press conference this fall and will deliver your drawings to Congress. We hope to present them with thousands of drawings from all over the country asking them to do

what they need to do to keep our children safe and positively engaged when parents have to work.

There are so many children and families affected by this urgent need. Each day, over 2 million Black children under six—or two-thirds of all Black pre-school children who are not yet enrolled in kindergarten—spend some or all of their day being cared for by someone other than their parents. Children of working mothers are entering care as early as six weeks of age and can be in care for 40 hours a week until they reach school age.

Child care and early education have become a fact of life for many Black families. In 1997, 72% of Black women with children under six, and 77% of Black women with children between the ages of six and 17 years old, were in the labor force.

Child care is a major household expense for working families. Full-day child care for one child costs \$4,000-\$10,000 per year—more than what many families pay for college tuition at an in-state public university. For example, the average annual price of child care in a center for a four-year old is \$4,630 in Los Angeles, \$4,990 in Atlanta, and \$7,700 in New York City. Child care for infants and high quality care is often even more expensive.

Many hard-working Black families earn too little to be able to afford the high cost of child care. About half of Black families with children earn less than \$23,000 a year, and half of Black families with children

under six earn less than \$20,500 a year.

The cost of providing care for children can easily exceed a family's rent, mortgage, car payment, or groceries. A family earning \$25,000 could easily spend one-quarter of their income to pay for child care for one child—and the average family has two children. Families simply cannot afford the cost of good quality child care in addition to all of the other demands on their monthly budget.

Because for many families there seems to be no other choice, it has been estimated that nearly 5 million children nationwide are left unsupervised by an adult after school each week. Research suggests that children who are left home alone are more likely to use alcohol, marijuana, and cigarettes, and it is a fact that juvenile crime peaks between 3:00 and 7:00 pm when many children are unsupervised after school.

Since Black youth are overrepresented at every level of the juvenile justice system—they compromise only 14% of the total population but 28% of those arrested, 41% of those detained, and 52% of those waived into adult court—it is particularly crucial to offer safe and affordable quality care for our children's afterschool time.

Write to your representatives in congress today. And send us those drawing by your children. Those we elect to represent us must respond to the child care crisis today. We have to make them listen!

Big Sees Affirmative Action Showdown in Washington

■ BIG has been a leader in the Washington State fight along with a coalition of civil rights, civic, and union organizations.

Pointing to fraudulent and deceptive practices used in efforts to pass an anti-affirmative action law in Washington State, the president of Blacks in Government (BIG) warned that plans are underway to use similar practices in other states. Oscar Eason, Jr. told delegates attending the 28th Annual congressional Black Caucus legislative Forum that "if they are successful in passing the law on the November 3rd ballot, your state may be next."

"Having failed to persuade the Congress to pass an anti-affirmative action bill, they are now concentrating on the states. They succeeded in California and have not been able to win elsewhere. Now they see the

possibility of a victory in Washington State that could reinvigorate their campaign in other states," Eason said.

Proposition 200 was placed on the ballot when the backer obtained the necessary signatures. Like its California prototype, it would prohibit states from considering race or gender in hiring, promotion, contracting, and other state business. Despite efforts in other states, only Washington State has an anti-affirmative action initiative on the ballot in 1998.

Eason, a resident of Seattle, WA, said many people who sign the petition were confused by language which gave the impression that it would expand rather than curtail affirmative action. The initiative stated that "the state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment, to any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of

public employment, public education or public contracting. "This is an effort to conceal the true nature of the measure," he said.

The backers used substantial money from out-of-state sources to gain the necessary signature, contrary to the grassroots, civic nature of the referendum process. Much of the input comes from the same people who backed the California initiative, Eason said. According to press reports, some of the workers recruited from out-of-state to solicit votes said they were told it was a civil rights bill.

BIG has been a leader in the Washington State fight along with a coalition of civil rights, civic, and union organizations. The organization is composed of government employees from federal, state, and local agencies concerned with excellence in government through equality of opportunity.

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and understanding the importance of sharing.

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- North - Oct. 1 at Columbia Cottage, 4339 N. Lombard (in Columbia Park), 7-9 pm
- Far S.E. - Oct. 3 at East Portland Comm. Center, 740 SE 106 (at Stark), 1-3 pm
- N.W. - Oct. 6 at Northwest Service Center, 1819 NW Everett, 7-9 pm
- N.E. - Oct. 7 at Grant HS, 2245 NE 36 (between Tillamook & Knott), 7-9 pm

Want more information? Call Cece Noel
Portland Office of Transportation
823-7733