To: California Gubernatorial Candidates and Transition Team

From: End Child Poverty California Coalition, powered by GRACE
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Subject: The IMAGINE Agenda — A Blueprint to End Child Poverty in California

California has made historic progress toward ending child poverty, but rising poverty, persistent racial wealth disparities, and federal cuts to essential safety-net programs threaten these gains. **The next governor has an opportunity to advance a bold, comprehensive agenda that protects children and families, strengthens economic security, and dismantles the policies and systems that perpetuate poverty.**

End Child Poverty California's **IMAGINE Agenda** envisions a California where every child and family is **Secure, Nourished, Respected, Valued, and Free**. Since 2017, our coalition has been able to *achieve full or partial progress on all 43 recommendations* included in the End Child Poverty Plan helping drive billions in investments to lift children and families out of poverty. Now, as H.R. 1 threatens to push millions more into poverty and deepen racial inequities, California has an opportunity to protect these gains, counter the federal administration's harmful policies, and advance a more equitable future.

Five Pillars and Key Policy Priorities

1. WE ARE SECURE — Dismantling Poverty by Design

- **Raise progressive revenue:** Ensure wealthy individuals and profitable corporations contribute their fair share to protect essential basic services and counter federal disinvestment.
- **Strengthen CalWORKs:** Increase cash assistance, eliminate punitive sanctions, support family reunification, and prevent budget shifts from reducing benefits for families experiencing poverty.

2. WE ARE NOURISHED — No One Goes Hungry

- **Advance Food for All:** Expand state-funded California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) benefits to all children regardless of immigration status, households excluded from CalFresh under H.R. 1, and continue Food4All efforts.

- **Prevent a statewide hunger crisis:** Strengthen CalFresh administration and outreach while addressing payment-error risks and limiting reliance on unregulated artificial intelligence systems that can introduce bias and restrict access to benefits.

3. WE ARE RESPECTED — Dignity, Fair Pay, and Worker Justice

- **Make child care accessible and affordable:** Protect the commitment to create 200,000 new child care slots by 2027, establish full-cost-of-care reimbursement, and ensure providers receive adequate resources and fair compensation.
- **Opportunity 4 All, Regardless of Immigration Status:** Enshrine equal employment opportunities for students and workers at public higher education institutions.
- **Reform child support collection:** Pass through the full amount of child support payments to CalWORKs families rather than intercepting funds intended for children.

4. WE ARE VALUED — Every Family Belongs

- **Invest in Promise Neighborhoods:** Provide dedicated funding for Promise Neighborhoods to strengthen their partnership with Community Schools to connect children and families with trusted, place-based supports that increase vital access to food, housing, health care, education, and mental health services.
- **Protect Health for All:** Restore and protect full-scope Medi-Cal access for immigrants, eliminate enrollment freezes and state-imposed premiums, preserve access to benefits, and reject policies that shift health care costs onto families and counties.

5. WE ARE FREE — Economic and Racial Justice

- **Close the racial wealth gap through HOPE Accounts:** Restore the $40 million cut from the original $100 million investment and expand eligibility to children born through Medi-Cal-covered births and infants ages zero to one enrolled in Medi-Cal.
- **Establish permanent statewide guaranteed income:** Build on California's pilot programs with accessible, community-designed income support that supplements rather than replaces existing public benefits.
- **Expand refundable tax credits:** Increase access to CalEITC, the Young Child Tax Credit, and other refundable credits; strengthen free tax preparation and ITIN services.

- **Advance criminal and youth justice reforms:** Reduce the criminalization of poverty, invest in community-based safety and prevention, and eliminate systemic barriers to housing, education, employment, and economic mobility.

Governor's First Budget is a Northstar Opportunity

The next California Governor can build a California where all our children and families are valued and free. This vision of our future guides our priorities and actions, informing the strategies we use to turn vision into reality.

Poverty is not inevitable—it is the result of policy choices. Through the IMAGINE Agenda, California can build on a decade of progress and realize a future where every child and family is secure, nourished, respected, valued, and free.