

**Draft Resolution on Confronting Poverty:
Affordable High-Quality Early Childhood Care and Education for Ages Zero Through
Five**

Sponsors: Task Force on Equal Opportunity and Social Justice

Summary: This resolution provides a comprehensive framework for early childhood programs including education, child care, and home visits to confront poverty by supporting the young. It focuses on age 0-5 programs and updates and expands the JCPA’s current policy on early childhood education to include a broad range of related social services.

1 In the U.S., a child’s prospect for the future is more dependent on a parent’s income and
2 education than in any other advanced country. Rabbi Michael Rothbaum of Danville, California
3 observes: “As Jews, who’ve suffered generations of personal and economic degradation, we
4 should know better. As Jews possessed of a timeless text that links us to our economically
5 exploited ancestors in Egypt, we should *do* better. And as Jews who gifted the world the concept
6 of *tzedek*, of a just and fair economic order, we should *be* better. It is our job, our sacred task.”

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8 Recent neurological studies draw a connection between the effects of poverty on young
9 children’s brain development, such that living in poverty subjects them to additional stress and
10 hindered development compared to their counterparts of greater economic advantage. Stress and
11 adversity (emotional, physical, chemical) that occur before age two in the human brain result in
12 long-term irreversible damage. Before the age of six, the brain quadruples in weight and reaches
13 90 percent of its adult size. The brain is the most flexible early in life and its capacity for change
14 decreases with age.

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16 In the United States, 38 percent of three-year-olds are enrolled in early education programs;
17 whereas in the other 34 industrialized countries, on average 70 percent of children are enrolled.
18 The most solid evidence-based programs to support healthy infant development from high-risk
19 poor and low-income homes include:

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21 (1) Access to high-quality early childhood education (ECE) beginning by age three, (2)
22 developmental screening and assessment and services for children at risk for developmental
23 delays, (3) access to affordable high-quality child care to promote greater development in low-
24 income and at-risk children, and (4) home visitation programs for pregnant and low-income new

25 mothers for a two-year period. These measures can minimize the effects of poverty on a young
26 child’s development and therefore help children break out of the cycle of poverty.

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28 The JCPA believes that:

29 • The most important action our nation can take to reduce inequality and create opportunity for
30 the poor is to invest in children at the beginning of life in order to stop the cycle of poverty.

31 • We call upon the federal government to require and make funds available for:

32 ○ High-quality ECE for children by age three for poor and low-income families.

33 Beginning this assistance by age three can reduce the achievement gap for children
34 whose home environment makes them highly vulnerable for failure. ECE can reduce
35 the effects of risk factors on young children’s development and well-being, increasing
36 their chances of success.

37 ○ Periodic developmental screening and assessment services—children do best when
38 developmental delays are identified early and they receive the necessary treatment or
39 intervention as soon as possible.

40 ○ Access to high-quality affordable child care for children ages zero through five years
41 in order to support the economic stability of families, especially among low-income
42 and high-risk populations.

43 ○ Public and private sector policies that would expand access to affordable child
44 services and subsidies (block grants, flexible spending account options, etc.).

45 ○ Home visitation programs for poor and low-income and at-risk pregnant women,
46 expectant parents, and families with newborns and infants. These programs have been
47 shown to be an effective way to increase the chances of a child’s healthy development
48 and educational success.

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50 The community relations field should:

51 • Educate the Jewish community on the pervasive nature of poverty as one of the high
52 predictors of poor developmental and educational outcomes in children. In addition, children
53 from low-income families are more likely to experience physical and emotional challenges
54 that can lead to developmental delays and disabilities.

- 55 • Urge the federal administration and Congress, the states, school districts, for-profit and non-
56 profit organizations, faith-based organizations, foundations, trusts, businesses, individual
57 philanthropists, and others to create, support, and implement high-quality and affordable
58 early childhood care and education programs.
- 59 • Participate in coalitions to grow the visibility and availability of affordable early childhood
60 care, education, and developmental assessment services; and advocate for robust funding for
61 high-quality programming at the state and community levels.
- 62 • Partner with state and local entities that provide effective direct service home visitation
63 education programs for high-risk poor and low-income pregnant women and mothers of
64 newborns.