

Raising Kids **Parents vote for kids**

By Julieta Santana

Parents are mobilizing around the elections as a way to campaign for programs that support children. As the *Children's Advocate* goes to press, California still does not have a state budget, and cuts to children's programs are not completely off the table. Meanwhile, many cities and counties are cutting programs for children and families—and some are trying to stave off deeper cuts with ballot measures to raise local taxes.

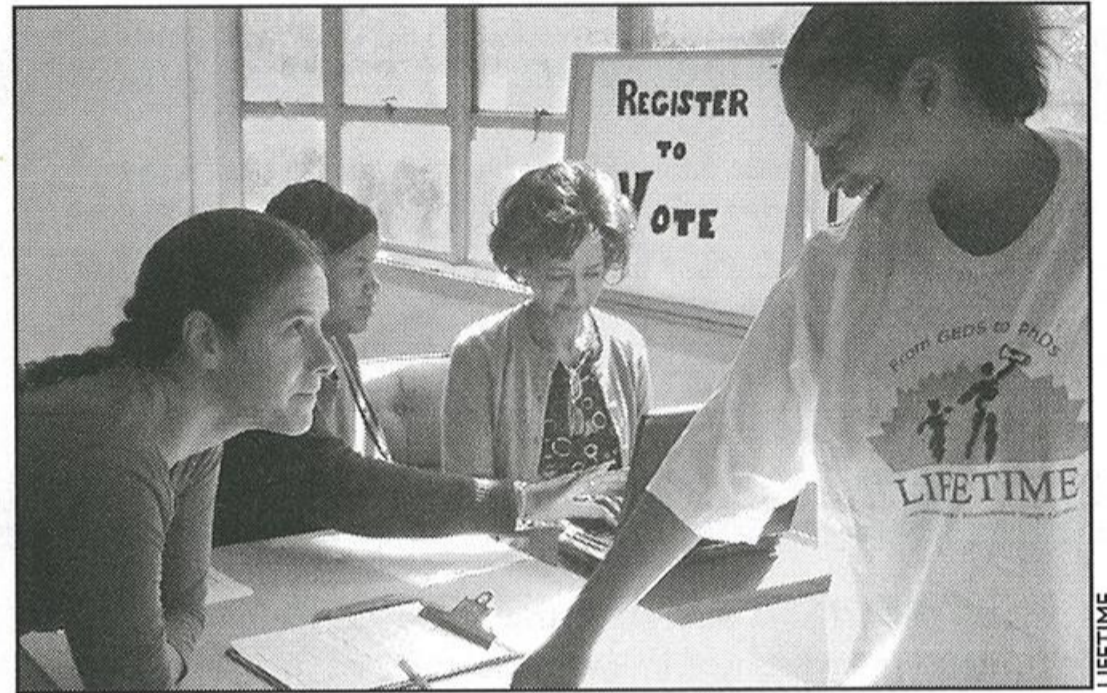
Proposed budget cuts are targeting “the programs low-income communities need the most,” says Astrid Campos, the LA Regional Organizer for the California Partnership. Many elected officials are advocates for children, but “in one of the hardest-hit cities...the Senator is not voting for his community. Why not? The low-income voting presence [there] is not strong enough,” she adds.

Educate your community—and your children

San Francisco mom Toni Hines registered voters and collected signatures to help get a measure on the ballot to off-set recent city budget cuts by taxing hotels an additional two percent. Hines also shows her daughter how to be politically active—the seven-year-old goes with her mom to the voting booth, rallies, community meetings, and even decided to speak at a First Five meeting about funding for children's programs.

“I tell my daughter, ‘A lot of people fought and died for me to vote. It's a privilege and obligation,’” says Hines, a parent advocate with Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth. “I am the go-to person in my family,” she adds. “They call me and ask, ‘Which way would you vote?’”

Another San Francisco mom Maritza Di Cicco talked with her nine- and fourteen-year-old children about the Hotel Initiative: “I told them, ‘That way you will have an afterschool program.’” Originally from Guatemala,



LIFETIME members Dawn Love and Ashley Smith help parents register to vote.

Di Cicco is also with Coleman Advocates and a recent US citizen.

Even if parents cannot vote, they can “engage other community members and affect political decisions,” says Arnulfo De La Cruz, Associate Director of Coleman Advocates. Coleman parents are also campaigning for a measure that would allow undocumented parents to vote for school board members. “Undocumented parents have a powerful story to tell,” he adds.

Work with politicians to support children

After the elections, parents plan to continue speaking out to elected officials. “It doesn't take a lot to make a difference,” says Diana Spatz, once a single mother on welfare who went on to found LIFETIME. LIFETIME encourages parents to meet with officials—or even call about an issue. An aide once told parents that if the legislative office got five phone calls about an issue, they would brief staff, Love recalls. Parents also sent baby shoes to an Assembly Member with notes reminding her who would be hurt by the budget cuts, she adds.

Parents need to mobilize, adds De La Cruz, because California's budget climate is the result “of having a whole group of parents shut out of the system.”

For more election-related resources, see p.5