

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Geoff Garin and Mark Bunge, Hart Research Associates
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RE: Key Findings from Surveys among California Voters and Low-income Parents on Child Poverty

Introduction and Methodology

On behalf of GRACE and The California Endowment, Hart Research Associates conducted two surveys to better understand Californians' experiences with, perceptions of, and solutions to child poverty in California. One was a statewide telephone survey among a representative cross section of 601 California registered voters. Interviewing was conducted October 21 to 26, 2013, and the survey has a margin of error of ± 4 percentage points. The other survey was among a statewide cross section of 300 low-income parents and caregivers who have a minor child at home and earn less than 150% of the federal poverty limit. Interviewing was conducted October 29 to November 8, 2013, and the survey has a margin of error of ± 5.7 percentage points.

Key Research Findings

- 1. The average California voter faces a very different day-to-day financial reality than parents in poverty.** While 65% of all voters say they are living comfortably or able to put money aside, 73% of low-income parents are just meeting their basic expenses or falling behind.
- 2. Low-income parents have been affected deeply by the recession, but also by cuts to state and local government programs resulting from California's recent budget shortfalls.** Fully nine in 10 low-income parents say they were affected a great deal (52%), some (22%) or at least a little (15%) by the recession and weak economic recovery, while three-quarters say that cuts in state and local government programs affected their family a great deal (36%) some (22%) or at least a little (18%).
- 3. Low-income parents and their families face myriad challenges ranging from crime and violence to lack of affordable child care or early education, but a lack of living wage jobs is preeminent.** Large majorities of low-income parents say their families face problems such as a lack of school funding (75% say this is a major, somewhat, or minor problem for their family), crime and gang violence (75%), lack of affordable housing (73%), lack of public assistance (67%), access to health care and nutrition for their kids (61%), access to early education (59%), and affordable child care (59%). But the two most common challenges for low-income parents are a shortage of jobs (87%) or too many jobs being part-time or low-wage (84%).

- 4. Low-income parents say that education is a core aspiration and the key to a better life for their children.** When asked what their most important goals were for themselves and their children, more than half (53%) of parents volunteered getting a good education, especially a post-secondary education. Education dwarfed all other responses, including having a good career (12%), getting ahead in life (12%), being in good health (6%), or owning a home (5%).
- 5. Most low-income parents have used Med-Cal (71%) and food assistance such as WIC or Cal-Fresh (63%), but beyond those two programs, relatively few parents are using other types of public assistance,** including the EITC (36%), Cal-Works (26%), public housing assistance (17%), and government-supported child care (13%) or job training (12%).
- 6. Even with public assistance, low-income parents worry about providing their kids with the very necessities of life, including food and health care.** Two-thirds (67%) of low-income parents say they worry frequently, sometimes, or at least occasionally about being unable to provide adequate health care for their kids, a similar number worries about affording healthy food for their families (66%)—or any food at all (64%)—and the quality of schools in their neighborhood (65%). Half (52%) worry about getting time off of work if necessary to care for a sick child or family member, and 49% worry about being able to find affordable, quality child care.
- 7. There is a broad consensus in California that the state government has a responsibility to ensure that children do not live in poverty.** Fully 63% of California voters agree that the state government has such a responsibility, including large majorities of registered Democrats (76%) and nonpartisan voters (66%), as well as half (52%) of self-identified moderate or liberal Republicans.
- 8. Indeed, reducing child poverty is a much higher priority for voters than reducing taxes.** Sixty-one percent (61%) of California voters say that reducing the number of children living in poverty should be an absolute top priority or a high priority for the state, versus just 41% who say the same about reducing taxes on individuals and businesses. Again, only the most conservative Republicans put a higher priority on tax reduction than keeping kids out of poverty, while Democrats, nonpartisan voters, and even moderate/liberal Republicans place a higher priority on reducing child poverty than taxes.
- 9. Voter support for reducing child poverty holds up even when there is a price tag attached.** A large majority (64%) of voters would be willing to pay \$50 more a year in state taxes to reduce the number of children living in poverty, including 78% of Democrats, 69% of non-partisan voters, and 59% of moderate/liberal Republicans.
- 10. Voters strongly favor every specific policy intervention aimed at helping low-income children that we tested,** with the greatest support for ensuring that all children get good health care (86% favor), improving the quality of public schools (85%), offering more after-school activities (84%), improving support for foster youth (82%), ensuring universal access to high-quality preschool programs (78%), and investing in economic development in low-income neighborhoods (78%).