

A POLICY AGENDA for the childRen

Para Los Niños' vision for community-driven systems that support the whole child and their whole family

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LETTER FROM THE CEO

Dear Neighbors,

We are so proud and honored to present Para Los Niños' first policy and advocacy agenda, focused on supporting the whole child and their whole family.

In 2024, we launched a three-year strategic plan in which we committed to three core goals to advance our work; one of those goals identified the importance of raising our voice through advocacy in order to leverage our expertise to impact broad systemic change in programs and policies. With more than 46 years partnering with Angelenos to achieve their educational, emotional, and economic goals, we know that the success of our children is deeply connected to the well-being of their families. It is our decades of experience as a direct service provider that allows us to see the impact of policy decisions and to propose how we strengthen the resources, benefits, and services our families deserve.

Our vision for the agenda is grounded in our mission and values, but more importantly, it is grounded in the voices of families enrolled across our programs—from early education and TK-8th grade to youth workforce services, mental health, family services, and community transformation.



"The success of our children is deeply connected to the well-being of their families."

-Drew Furedi, President & CEO

PLN's policy agenda is more than a document; it is a framework to ensure our children, youth, and families have access to everything they need to thrive. It is also a call to action for supporters, organizations, and elected officials across the region to partner with us on the priorities and recommendations in the agenda.

We know that we cannot do this work alone, but collectively, our voices will be heard to create lasting change.

With gratitude,

President & CEO, Para Los Niños

INTRODUCTION

At Para Los Niños (PLN), we serve powerful communities with rich cultural traditions and strong family ties. Children of every race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or immigration status deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential. PLN brings together prevention, early intervention, and community engagement to serve the whole child, whole family, and communities in which families reside.

Through our direct work with families, we have witnessed what is possible when families are supported holistically with the programs and resources they need to thrive. At the same time, we know that there are various systemic barriers that hold families back and reinforce inequities. For far too long, families and those closest to the issues have been sidelined from conversations about policies meant to support them. That is why we partnered with families to shape and drive our policy agenda. PLN's Policy Agenda for the Children redefines what is possible when policy is designed with, not just for, families.

This policy agenda serves as a roadmap and call to action for collaboration with policymakers, advocates, and communities to join us in advocating for policies that center families.

Why We're Creating a Policy Agenda

Centered on the voices of families, we developed a policy agenda that outlines the policy priorities most important to families. These priorities are grounded in a whole-child and whole-family perspective. We believe this is central to shaping effective policies and ensuring long-term solutions. When policies, institutions, and spaces are designed to meet the needs of families, everyone benefits.

Our work sits at the intersection of the systems families navigate most, including education, housing stability, health, and economic security. Each year, we serve more than 10,000 children, youth and their families through 16 sites across Los Angeles County. Our work spans dozens of neighborhoods including Downtown, Pico Union, Hollywood, and South Los Angeles, and reaches residents in eight cities, including Burbank, Compton, Lynwood, and El Monte. Our footprint also crosses key decision-making boundaries, including two Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Board Districts, four City Council Districts, four Los Angeles County Supervisorial Districts, five State Assembly Districts, and four State Senate Districts.

With tens of thousands of families served every year, more than 400 employees, and a $55 million operating budget, PLN is an essential community institution and significant employer in Los Angeles. PLN serves as a trusted safety net, a connector to vital resources, and a source of support for families where and when it is needed most. That breadth and day-to-day proximity to the community gives PLN a unique, grounded, and credible perspective to share with community leaders and elected officials, to ensure policy and funding decisions reflect what families need to thrive across Los Angeles.



OUR GUIDING VALUES

Families should be centered and elevated in policymaking and decision-making.

These values are the foundation for how we co-designed and plan to implement our policy agenda.

- **Whole-family and whole-child focus:** We commit to centering policies that recognize the interconnected needs of children, parents, and caregivers.
- **Community-grounded advocacy**: We advocate for policy decisions rooted in the trust and relationships PLN has built with families, ensuring their voices shape priorities and actions.
- **Collaborative action**: We commit to work alongside partners, recognizing that meaningful systemic change requires collaboration.
- **Continuous learning**: We aim to approach advocacy with curiosity, humility, and a growth mindset, consistently seeking feedback to improve and adapt.

Our Community-Driven Approach

In 2025, we launched a community-centered approach to gathering insights from our community about what matters most to them. 596 youth, parents and caregivers and 108 staff members participated in a survey, with more than 130 family respondents participating in listening sessions to share their top challenges preventing them from reaching their full potential and what could help their communities succeed.

We intentionally designed listening sessions to be welcoming spaces where families could reflect together, make sense of shared experiences, and move community insight toward action. Rather than leveraging families solely as participants in a data collection process, we invited them in as knowledge holders, analysts, and co-creators of policy priorities. Families helped us interpret survey findings, identify root causes, and lift up solutions they believe would have the greatest impact.

Together, we explored questions such as: **What would safe, stable, affordable housing look like for you and your family? What has gotten in the way of that vision? What patterns do we notice across our experiences? And what would help families in this community access the housing they need?**

This approach ensured that families' experiences directly informed actions and solutions to achieve meaningful policy impact.

WHO WE SERVE





The Families PLN Partners With

10,000+

Children, youth, families, and community members served annually

850+

Children enrolled in our early education centers, charter elementary and middle schools

6wks-82yo

The age range of those receiving services through our programs

90%

of families enrolled in PLN programs make less than $50,000 a year

20%

of PLN students from Early Head Start through 8th grade are unhoused

97%

of those served in our student and community services department identify as people of color

16

Locations across Los Angeles, including mental health, workforce development, and family service centers

91%

of youth from our Youth Workforce Services who enrolled in college were first-generation students

93%

of families enrolled in PLN programs live in areas with the highest levels of food insecurity & homelessness in SPAs 4 & 6

KEY LEARNINGS FROM FAMILIES & STAFF

PLN staff and families' three biggest challenges:

1. **COST OF LIVING**
2. **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**
3. **ACCESS TO JOBS AND LIVING WAGES**

Families described a set of interconnected challenges impacting their ability to survive and thrive, including:

- Affordable housing is out of reach, unsafe, or comes with strict barriers.
- Rising costs of living are straining families' ability to thrive.
- Immigration enforcement creates fear and instability for families.
- Jobs are unstable and don't pay enough to meet the living wage.
- Families are experiencing repetitious trauma, deteriorating their mental health and well-being.
- Neighborhood safety issues add to families' daily stress.

"The jobs are very tight, meaning there are days where the only person working in our household is the father of my daughter, and with everything happening right now with the raids, he works as a gardener and is working less."

-Family Member, PLN Listening Session

FAMILY SURVEY FINDINGS

Families are struggling to survive, let alone thrive.



4 in 10

families had work hours reduced or pay cut last year.



>1/3

of families struggled to pay rent.

OUR POLICY PRIORITIES

Grounded in the experiences and perspectives of the families we serve, PLN's policy agenda includes five policy priorities. Each priority represents a set of near-term interventions and long-term changes needed to address the interconnected challenges families are experiencing and create the conditions they need to thrive. We recognize that advocacy work takes time, and progress happens through incremental wins as well as larger policy shifts.

The goal of the agenda is to be our guide as we move through advocacy work. It will ensure our efforts are timely, impactful, and—most importantly—lead us to effective policy solutions. Together, these priorities provide a roadmap for sustained, community-rooted advocacy that keeps families' needs, voices, and aspirations at the center.



1 **Ensure affordable, stable and dignified housing in safe communities.** All families can secure and maintain safe, healthy, dignified, and affordable housing in the neighborhood of their choice, with the supports needed to stay housed. Homelessness prevention happens through timely navigation, stabilization services, and financial assistance. Families and individuals who are unsheltered are connected to immediate resources and sustained supports that move them from crisis to stable, long-term housing.

2 **Every job should provide living wages, dignity, security, and advancement.** All working family members can access employment that provides economic security and pathways to advancement. A living wage from full-time work covers basic needs (including housing, healthcare, and childcare), reflects local costs and family size, and allows families to save and plan for the future. Jobs pay at least a living wage and support health and stability through benefits, safe working conditions, predictable hours when possible, and opportunities for training and upward mobility.

"I can't go out with confidence, saying, 'Yes, I'm going to work safely and whatever little or much I earn can go toward paying my bills,' because I'm afraid they might detain me. I'm not able to show up to work because of that fear."

-Family Member, PLN Listening Session

> **"I was the only person who could apply, supposedly, because I had social security, but I didn't have credit. They weren't going to give it to me. And if they didn't give it to me, I was going to be left on the street."**
>
> *-Family Member, PLN Listening Session*

3 **Protect and keep immigrant families together.** Immigrant families can live, work, and access support without fear of discrimination or deportation. Immigrant workers have strong workplace protections, fair treatment, and support to find and keep stable employment. State and city systems provide trusted, language-accessible supports that are easy to access and designed to reach immigrant communities facing the greatest barriers.

4 **Create a coherent and compassionate social safety net that is responsive to families.** All families can access a coordinated, efficient system of support that responds to their needs with dignity and flexibility. Families navigate one integrated system instead of multiple disconnected programs with conflicting requirements and duplicative applications. Neighborhood-based community hubs, including community schools, help connect families to integrated supports. Compassionate support also means removing barriers to qualify for assistance programs, including unrealistic income limits that create "benefit cliffs" where families lose critical assistance before obtaining true stability.

5 **Support communities through nonprofit sustainability.** Philanthropy and government fund nonprofits in ways that match what it actually takes to serve communities well, for the long term. Funding covers the full costs, including direct program expenses, organizational overhead, and equitable wages and benefits. Public contracts are longer-term, such as 5 to 7 years, with realistic budgets and streamlined requirements, so nonprofits are not forced to front costs or absorb losses to deliver services.



POLICY PRIORITY

Ensure affordable, stable and dignified housing in safe communities

WHY IT MATTERS

Stable and affordable housing is foundational to family health, well-being, and economic security; and where housing is located shapes access to jobs, schools, services, and amenities that support mobility.[1] Investing in family housing also strengthens the broader economy.[2]

Yet a home that is affordable is increasingly out of reach for too many families, and rent is too high. Nearly half of renters in Los Angeles County are rent burdened, meaning more than 30% of their income goes towards rent;[3] and nearly a quarter are severely rent burdened, meaning that rent eats up more than half of their income.

Additionally, homelessness among families is on the rise. More than 300,000 people accessed homeless services in 2023 across the state, and nearly 40% were families with children.[4]

WE CALL ON STATE & LOCAL LEADERS TO:

- Increase and expand family-centered funding programs to prevent and combat homelessness (e.g., rent relief).
- Increase and protect the availability of affordable and high-quality housing.
- Strengthen renter protections and stability measures to promote stability and dignity, and to prevent homelessness.



300,000+

Californians accessed homeless services across the state in 2023



40% *were families with children*

WHAT WE HEARD FROM PLN FAMILIES

Affordable housing feels fundamentally out of reach, and market-rate rents far exceed what families can afford. Families face steep barriers at every stage of the affordable housing process, from finding available units to qualifying and staying housed once placed. When units do appear, many families remain excluded due to rigid eligibility criteria, including unforgiving income thresholds, lengthy employment history requirements, complex application processes, and documentation barriers such as the refusal to accept Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITIN.)

Unable to access subsidized housing, many families turn to the private rental market, where barriers are even steeper. These include high upfront costs, strict credit requirements, and income requirements that demand they earn three times the rent. The combination of high costs, strict requirements, unsafe conditions, and chronic instability leaves families feeling trapped, stressed, and unable to build the stability they need to thrive.

POLICY PRIORITY

Every job should provide living wages, dignity, security, and advancement

WHY IT MATTERS

Living wages lift people out of poverty and provide opportunities that enable people to meet their families' financial needs. Living wages strengthen businesses, contributing to increased productivity, reduced turnover, and enhanced morale.[5,6] Living wages also contribute to increased local tax revenue and reduce the need for government assistance.

Yet wages have failed to keep up with the cost of living. Nearly half of full-time workers in the United States do not earn a living wage;[7] and in California, about 5.6 million people, or one in three workers, are paid low wages. These workers earn less than two-thirds of the state's median full-time wage, with foreign-born, Black, and Latino workers disproportionately represented among those earning less than $19.69 per hour.[8] As everyday costs continue to rise, nearly 7 in 10 Americans are concerned about the rising cost of living.

Young people entering the workforce for the first time face a host of unprecedented challenges, including higher competition for roles, monumental technological changes, and uncertain career paths. The number of entry-level job postings has dropped substantially over the past two years.[9]

WE CALL ON STATE & LOCAL LEADERS TO:

- Advance living wage standards so wages not only support housing, but also address basic needs, build savings, and enable education to position families for financial security.
- Invest in long-term youth career development, guidance, and clear pathways into high-quality careers. Support agencies in designing, implementing, and strengthening sector-based trade programs that connect workers to higher-wage occupations across a wide spectrum of industries.



5.6M

workers in California are paid low wages, below ⅔ of the state's median full-time wage



1 in 3 *workers in California are paid low wages*

WHAT WE HEARD FROM PLN FAMILIES

Rising costs of living are straining families' ability to survive, let alone thrive. Families are not earning enough to cover basic living expenses, and costs continue to rise. This forces families into a perpetual state of "check-to-check" survival, often requiring them to make sacrifices on basic needs, pay bills late, or take on unstable or informal jobs. As a result, their capacity to build long-term savings is significantly constrained.

Families report that jobs are very unstable, with few or unpredictable hours, temporary or seasonal positions, and discriminatory and predatory practices adding to their economic insecurity. Families and youth stressed there are many obstacles preventing them from accessing higher-paying or stable jobs, including a lack of necessary formal qualifications and the limitations that come with being undocumented.

POLICY PRIORITY

Protect and keep immigrant families together

WHY IT MATTERS

Immigrants are a cornerstone of California and Los Angeles, making up over a quarter of the state's population and over a third (34%) in Los Angeles County.[10] As neighbors, business owners, taxpayers, and workers, immigrants are an essential part of California's economy. They contribute hundreds of billions of dollars in federal, state, and local taxes. Their economic contributions far outweigh the cost of additional public services they incur.

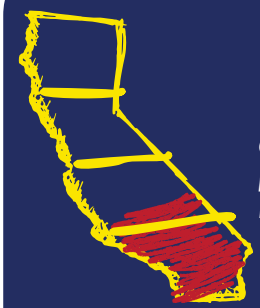
Now more than ever, immigrant families are under attack from federal policy changes and increased enforcement efforts. Federal immigration agencies ramped up enforcement operations in Los Angeles in early June 2025, transforming daily life for immigrant families. The raids have overwhelmingly focused on workplaces, which has deterred immigrants from making a living.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM PLN FAMILIES

Families describe several challenges associated with immigration status and the continued presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in our communities, including living with pervasive fear and stress of deportation, losing out on work hours because the small business where they work is seeing fewer customers come in due to the same fear, and inability to secure stable legal employment because of their immigration status. Many of the families in the sessions shared their desire to receive proper documentation to be able to work to support their families and fulfill their dreams of success.

WE CALL ON STATE & LOCAL LEADERS TO:

- Protect and support immigrant families through local measures that prevent discrimination based on immigration status and promote privacy, safety, and economic relief.
- Support equitable access to employment by advancing pathways to work authorization and workforce participation for immigrant communities.
- Strengthen labor protections and invest in programs that increase workers' and employers' understanding of workplace rights, responsibilities, and protections.
- Strengthen the expansion of culturally-responsive essential programs and services within the state, city, and county, ensuring services reach immigrant communities who face the greatest barriers.



34%

of Los Angeles County's population is made up of immigrants

>25% *of the state of California*



POLICY PRIORITY

Create a coherent and compassionate social safety net that is responsive to families

WHY IT MATTERS

A truly responsive and compassionate safety net centers community, families, and children. It holistically supports family well-being with integrated supports and multiple entry points and meets families where they are. When families are supported this way, children thrive, and communities remain stable.

Yet the systems families encounter every day remain fragmented, confusing, rigid, and deeply misaligned with that vision. Programs designed to provide relief have instead become sources of confusion, exclusion, and declining trust. Families must navigate multiple agencies, duplicate applications, conflicting documentation requirements, and different eligibility rules, creating more barriers than access points for families.

Research shows that even when families qualify for multiple public assistance programs, many access only a few, because navigating complex and fragmented systems can be difficult. This challenge is compounded by administrative barriers such as outdated income eligibility thresholds that fail to reflect today's cost of living. Families also face benefit cliffs, where modest income increases can result in the loss of critical benefits, leaving them no better off financially. In addition, benefit walls can prevent eligible families from receiving support when differing program requirements—such as immigration status, employment history, or documentation rules—create gaps in access to essential resources.

WE CALL ON STATE & LOCAL LEADERS TO:

- Uproot and rebuild resource systems to be more integrated and family-centric, so that resources are readily available and easy to access for every community member.
- Remove barriers for benefit qualification, including unrealistic income limits. Broaden and consider income eligibility thresholds so that financial progress is never penalized. Reform and coordinate multi-program eligibility so that qualifying for one program opens doors to others rather than closing them and expands accepted documentation so that all families can access the support they need.
- Expand and sustain funding for community hubs that deliver integrated services in families' own neighborhoods. Models like PLN's Community Schools have demonstrated that co-locating education, health, mental health, financial, housing, legal, and benefits enrollment support in trusted community spaces reduces barriers and builds trust.
- Advocate for the design, implementation, and accountability of safety net programs that are informed by and responsive to the families they serve.
- Expand and sustain funding for affordable, high-quality child care and early education for all families and children that includes comprehensive support services. To ensure high-quality learning, policies should include fair compensation for the educator workforce.

POLICY PRIORITY
Create a coherent and compassionate social safety net that is responsive to families, cont.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM PLN FAMILIES

Families described a system that is exhausting to navigate and quick to exclude. Many shared the experience of hitting a benefit wall, qualifying on one category only to be turned away from another, whether because of a documentation requirement, an income cap that was exceeded, or a program that simply did not accept Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). The loss of one benefit can often trigger a domino effect: losing childcare support can make it harder to sustain a job; losing food assistance can force impossible choices between rent and groceries. Families described programs that served children separately from their parents, treating housing as disconnected from health or education, even though, in their lived experience, everything is deeply interconnected. Across the sessions, families asked for a system that sees them as a whole and one that is responsive.



"As a single mother, I'm confused and exhausted. If I don't get help with housing and stability, my son could also end up with mental health problems."

-Family Member, PLN Listening Session

POLICY PRIORITY

Support communities through nonprofit sustainability

WHY IT MATTERS

Nonprofit sustainability is both an economic and equity imperative. The nonprofit sector is the fourth largest employer in California, employing an estimated 1.8 million people.[11] Los Angeles County has the largest nonprofit workforce in California, with approximately 404,398 nonprofit employees.[12] These organizations are essential to community well-being. They fill gaps when public resources, services, and benefits fall short; and they often reach children, youth, and families quickly because they can combine public and private funding and respond flexibly to community needs.

PLN is a part of this critical nonprofit infrastructure. Serving tens of thousands of families each year, PLN is a cornerstone of community stability and opportunity in Los Angeles. With more than 400 employees and a $55 million operating budget, PLN delivers critical services at scale while sustaining a strong local workforce and contributing to equitable economic impact.

WE CALL ON STATE & LOCAL LEADERS TO:

- Fund nonprofits in ways that center on community needs, cover direct program costs and organizational overhead, and ensure equitable wages for staff.
- Fund public contracts that are longer-term with realistic budgets and simpler requirements, so nonprofits are not forced to take financial losses to deliver services.



22%

of nonprofit employees across the US lived in households struggling financially

Up to now, nonprofits are often expected to meet growing community needs with funding that is too limited, restrictive, or short-term. Like many nonprofit organizations, PLN depends on a diverse set of funding sources, including government contracts, grants, and private philanthropy. To accomplish its mission and vision, funding must cover direct program costs, indirect expenses, administrative infrastructure, and organizational overhead. Too often, funding does not fully account for what it takes to deliver consistent, high-quality, and long-lasting programs.

This funding gap also affects the nonprofit workforce. In 2024, a report by Independent Sector and United for ALICE found that an estimated 22% of nonprofit employees across the U.S. lived in households struggling financially.[13] Nonprofits need enough funding to offer competitive wages and benefits, recruit and retain skilled staff, and support employes who make community services possible.

Government agencies and foundations must provide more flexible, long-term, and comprehensive operating support. This includes timely contract payments; faster grant disbursements; streamlined administrative approvals; and funding that covers the real cost of programs, infrastructure, and staff. Flexible, sustained investment allows organizations like PLN to remain stable, responsive, and effective while continuing to meet the evolving needs of families and communities.

POLICY PRIORITY

Support communities through nonprofit sustainability, cont.

For PLN, funding shortages, budget cuts, and inadequate reimbursement rates have real consequences for the communities we serve. When funding does not keep pace with community needs or cover the true cost of services, organizations face difficult decisions that affect staffing, program capacity, and long-term sustainability. This can lead to workforce reductions, increased workloads, limited program growth, and challenges maintaining the infrastructure that supports service delivery.



Beyond organizational sustainability, these challenges directly impact the trust between staff and families seeking support. Underinvestment in nonprofit organizations limits the ability to respond to emerging needs, sustain high-quality programs, and provide the comprehensive services that children, youth, and families deserve. Investing in nonprofit sustainability is an investment in the well-being and stability of the communities that rely on them.

PLN—and all non-profits—are critical to the health, economy, and well-being of Los Angeles; and it is important that city, county, and state leaders prioritize non-profit success to ensure their constituents' needs are met.

"Up to now, nonprofits are often expected to meet growing community needs with funding that is too limited restrictive, or short-term, truly impacting how we do our work. "

Jimmy Urizar, Vice President, Community & Student Services

CONCLUSION

"The environment is so heavy... people are stressed, with or without papers. It all affects mental health."

-Family Member, PLN Listening Session

More than ever before, nonprofit organizations are being called to step up and step in to address gaps left by programs and policies that simply do not prioritize or even acknowledge the cross-sectional needs of families.

In Para Los Niños' listening sessions, it was evident that a policy agenda was necessary to target the unique needs of the communities we partner with to achieve their educational, emotional and economic goals. It is no longer enough to provide direct services that treat symptoms of larger, structural injustices. It is imperative that we work to address the barriers that prevent families from taking full advantage of the programs and services that PLN offers as well as the conditions that necessitate them. We are ready to advocate at the local, state, and federal levels to develop and implement effective and long-term policy solutions that will ensure our children, youth, and families have what they need to reach their fullest potential and thrive.

We are proud of what we have achieved in the last 46 years of building partnerships, deepening connections, and expanding services. Because of the authentic relationships cultivated between our community and our highly qualified and compassionate frontline staff, we know that securing a child's success means ensuring the well-being of their family. As we look to the future, this commitment will serve as our North Star, guiding every decision, partnership, and action we take.

A special thank you to Jenny Perla from Poder Consulting Group for your collaboration and your vision of the policy agenda.

Thank you to all the PLN staff, community partners, and organizations for their input, contributions, and support to develop this policy agenda. A special thank you to the youth and families who shared space with us and told their stories.

We are humbled by the trust families put in PLN, allowing us to walk alongside them through their hardest moments and highest achievements. We know the challenges children, youth, and families face every day cannot be solved by one organization. Together, we can advocate for solutions that create long-lasting change. We look forward to the new collaborations, opportunities, and triumphs that will arise from this policy agenda.

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A POLICY AGENDA for the children

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