

# Youth Health and Education Are Focus of Group's Campaign

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A Maryland child advocacy group has launched a campaign that suggests dozens of reforms it says would save the state money while improving education, children's health and economic security.

Advocates for Children & Youth has enlisted the support of hundreds of state and local lawmakers, business groups, law enforcement leaders and some top statewide officials, including Lt. Gov. [Anthony G. Brown](#) (D), for its "Maryland Can Do Better for Children" campaign.

The starting point for the Baltimore-based nonprofit group was a contradiction. Maryland is one of the country's wealthiest states, but ranks in the middle or worse in studies of infant mortality, child health, education and other measures of child and youth success.

"We need to restructure what we're doing," said Matthew Joseph, the group's executive director. "We are spending a lot of money on things that are not working."

The solutions advocated by the campaign that kicked off this month "are about government effectiveness," Joseph said. They stress the idea that prevention and early intervention can go a long way.

Even though Gov. [Martin O'Malley](#)'s administration has cut hundreds of millions of dollars from the state budget and plans to cut more, the advocates say their changes would result in net savings to the state of \$3.4 million in the next fiscal year: They would cost \$16.4 million but save almost \$20 million.

Among the recommendations are \$200,000 bonuses over four years for 200 principals with a proven track record in inner-city or challenging school environments. Strong principals across the state also would get bonuses of \$50,000 if they are able to turn around low-performing schools that fail to make progress under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. To offset the cost, the state could take money from an existing grant program for low-performing schools that is not serving these schools exclusively, the group's report says.

Other recommendations include expanded services for foster families; more early prenatal care for underinsured women and insurance coverage for those at risk of high-risk pregnancies but not eligible for [Medicaid](#)-funded services; expanded rehabilitation services for troubled teenagers; better reimbursement rates for dentists to encourage them to serve the poor; and larger refundable tax credits for working families.

Many programs cost money upfront. But the campaign says they could save just as much, if not more, by using funds now set aside for ineffective programs or, in the case of troubled teenagers, diverting them from costly stays in group homes or detention centers.

Brown spokesman Mike Raia said the lieutenant governor has a long history of supporting child advocacy groups since his days serving in law school as a court-appointed special advocate for children without support systems. Brown also has campaigned for expanded foster care, Raia said.

O'Malley spokesman [Rick Abbruzzese](#) said in an e-mail, "The Governor looks forward to reviewing the report," and added that O'Malley has been working "right along" to improve children's lives through funding for public education and other efforts.