



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Commission on Children



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Marian Wright Edelman speaking on children and the recession at the Capitol on Friday, April 30

Marian Wright Edelman, whose work as a child advocate and civil-rights leader has won her the Presidential Medal of Freedom and many other honors, will come to the state Capitol in Hartford on Friday, April 30, to speak on "The Nation's Challenge: Children in the Economic Downturn."



Ms. Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, is coming to the state to celebrate the work of the Speaker's Task Force on Children in the Recession, a first-in-the-nation panel created by state House of Representatives Speaker Christopher Donovan and made up of lawmakers and organizations that work on behalf of children.

Ms. Edelman will speak at 1:30 p.m. in the Old Judiciary Room (3rd floor) of the state Capitol, as the guest of House Speaker Donovan and Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams, both of whom will introduce her.

There will be seating for the general public. No RSVPs are required, but because seating is very limited, those interested should arrive early.

Ms. Edelman's visit is made possible by generous funding from the Hartford Foundation of Public Giving. It is also sponsored by the Task Force, the General Assembly's Human Services Committee and Select Committee on Children, the Connecticut Commission on Children, and the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus.

About Marian Wright Edelman

Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), has been an advocate for disadvantaged Americans for her entire professional life. Under her leadership,

CDF has become the nation's strongest voice for children and families. The Children's Defense Fund's Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

Mrs. Edelman, a graduate of Spelman College and Yale Law School, began her career in the mid-'60s when, as the first black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar, she directed the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund office in Jackson, Mississippi. In 1968, she moved to Washington, D.C., as counsel for the Poor People's Campaign that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. began organizing before his death. She founded the Washington Research Project, a public interest law firm and the parent body of the Children's Defense Fund. For two years she served as the Director of the Center for Law and Education at Harvard University and in 1973 began CDF.

Mrs. Edelman served on the Board of Trustees of Spelman College, which she chaired from 1976 to 1987, and was the first woman elected by alumni as a member of the Yale University Corporation, on which she served from 1971 to 1977. She has received more than 100 honorary degrees and many awards, including the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Prize, the Heinz Award, and a MacArthur Foundation Prize Fellowship. In 2000, she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award, and the Robert F. Kennedy Lifetime Achievement Award for her writings, which include: "Families in Peril: An Agenda for Social Change"; "The Measure of Our Success: A Letter to My Children and Yours"; "Guide My Feet: Meditations and Prayers on Loving and Working for Children"; "Stand for Children; Lanterns: A Memoir of Mentors"; "Hold My Hand: Prayers for Building a Movement to Leave No Child Behind"; "I'm Your Child, God: Prayers for Our Children"; "I Can Make a Difference: A Treasury to Inspire Our Children"; and "The Sea Is So Wide and My Boat Is So Small: Charting a Course for the Next Generation."

She is a board member of the Robin Hood Foundation, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, and the Association to Benefit Children, and is a member of the Selection Committee of the Profiles in Courage Award of the John F. Kennedy Library, the Council on Foreign Relations, the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences.

Marian Wright Edelman is married to Peter Edelman, a professor at Georgetown Law School. They have three sons, Joshua, Jonah, and Ezra, two granddaughters, Ellika and Zoe, and two grandsons, Elijah and Levi. (Biography provided by the Children's Defense Fund.)

About the Speaker's Task Force on Children in the Recession

Speaker Donovan formed the Task Force to find ways of meeting the needs of Connecticut's youngest and most vulnerable citizens in this economic crisis. The panel began its work by hearing some startling numbers from experts. Among them:

-- An estimated 35,000 Connecticut children will be thrown into poverty by the downturn. Their lost earnings and poorer health as adults will cost our economy up to \$800 million a year.

-- Rural and suburban homelessness saw a dramatic increase in 2009, especially among families and children in families; both were up 33%.

-- Connecticut is last in the nation when it comes to school participation in the national School Breakfast Program, with only 39 percent of eligible children eating breakfast in school.

At public hearings held across the state, the Task Force heard dozens of parents and youths talk about the burdens of recession, from the Waterbury mother who is working three jobs because of her husband's job loss to the Glastonbury teen-ager who tearfully told of having to put her college dreams on hold because both parents had been laid off.

All of this information led the Task Force to craft House Bill 5360, a bill that would make Connecticut the first state in the nation to take a comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of children harmed by the economic downturn. The bill passed in the state House of Representatives on Tuesday and awaits action in the Senate.

Most importantly, the bill requires that whenever the state unemployment rate reaches 8 percent or higher, a leadership team from across state agencies will meet regularly to create a unified government response to such matters as hunger and homelessness.

It also seeks to improve the delivery of services to the families who need them by requiring state agencies to develop a single, streamlined application process for services like food stamps, the Care4Kids child-care program, unemployment, and medical assistance and insurance. This would not only simplify the application process for needy residents but make state government more efficient and cost-effective.

Further, the bill requires state agencies to do everything possible to secure the federal dollars available to them. The bill also:

-- allows parents receiving TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) to attend two- or four-year degree programs as one of the program's acceptable work activities, increasing their future productivity.

-- prohibits the Department of Social Services from closing the Care4Kids child-care assistance program without 30 days advance notice;

-- ensures essential services for homeless families and those at risk of homelessness;

-- calls for greater focus on reducing (a) the number of low birth-weight babies, (b) homeless children and families, and (c) food insecurity.

For more information, visit the Children in the Recession Task Force's home page, at www.cga.ct.gov/coc/taskforce.htm