

# Our kids. Our commitment.

Allegheny County Children's Fund Initiative

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the goal of the Allegheny County Children's Fund Initiative?**

The goal is to change the way programs that are proven to be effective in ensuring the wellbeing of our children are funded in Allegheny County.

### **What program areas would the Allegheny County Children's Fund support?**

Three specific areas proven to yield strong benefits for our children and our community: early childhood education, after school programs and good nutrition.

### **What other counties across the country have a children's fund?**

Similar funds exist in about 30 counties across the country, including 10 counties in Missouri, eight counties in Florida and in Seattle, San Francisco, Portland, San Antonio and a few rural counties in Ohio.

### **What are the outcomes for existing children's funds?**

All of the existing children's funds have seen positive increases in the outcomes for the kids they were designated to serve. For example, Pre-K for San Antonio saw double-digit increases in literacy and math and improvement in behavior. The Community Children's Services Fund in Missouri helped slash high school drop out rates by half. The Juvenile Welfare Board in Pinellas County, Florida, saw notable success in helping provide healthy meals to children; nearly all kids served were on track to be ready for school.

### **What organizations are involved in the initiative?**

The Allegheny County Children's Fund steering committee includes Allies for Children, Allegheny Partners for Out of School Time (APOST), Higher Achievement, the Human Services Center Corporation, The Mentoring Partnership, Pressley Ridge, PUMP, Trying Together, United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania, and the YWCA of Greater Pittsburgh, along with numerous community-based partners.

### **How will we create the Allegheny County Children's Fund?**

The Allegheny County Home Rule Charter and state law permit the residents of Allegheny County to pursue legislation tailored to causes they care about by using the voter referendum process to qualify a question for an election ballot. After the Our kids. Our commitment. initiative collected nearly 64,000 signatures over the summer, the Allegheny County Elections Department determined the question to pass the Allegheny County Children's Fund would be added to the Nov. 6, 2018, General Election ballot. If a simple majority of voters vote YES, then the measure will pass

**What is the question?**

“Shall the Allegheny County Home Rule Charter be amended to establish the Allegheny County Children’s Fund, funded by Allegheny County levying and collecting an additional 0.25 mills, the equivalent of \$25 on each \$100,000 of assessed value, on all taxable real estate, beginning January 1, 2019 and thereafter, to be used to improve the well-being of children through the provision of services throughout the County including early childhood learning, after school programs, and nutritious meals?”

**Why property tax? Are there other options?**

Because of state laws, the only funding source available to Allegheny County residents who intend to use the voter referendum process to pursue an issue they care about via the election ballot is property tax. Using a sales tax or any other tax would require state-level legislation, which is neither immediate, guaranteed nor locally controlled.

**How much would a homeowner pay?**

A 0.25 millage rate increase means a homeowner would pay an additional \$25 annually on each \$100,000 of assessed value. For the average homeowner in Allegheny County, the increase would be less than \$30 per year. This takes into account the Homestead Exemption, which reduces taxable assessed value by \$18,000 but not the Act 77 Senior Discount. This would generate about \$18 million in annual revenue.

More information about property tax relief is available [here](#).

**Who would decide how the funds are used?**

If voted into effect, the public Office of the Allegheny County Children’s Fund would be established and guided by a volunteer citizens’ advisory commission. The Allegheny County Children’s Fund Citizens’ Advisory Commission will simply make recommendations based on their field of expertise and have no role in determining how the funds will be distributed. The public office will be governed by public officials elected at the county level (County Executive, County Council) and overseen by the County Manager, who supervises all the offices within our county government like the department of human services, the parks department, etc.

Each year, the spending of the Allegheny County Children’s Fund would be incorporated into the annual budget of the County Executive, which is approved by the elected County Council.

**How will the citizens’ advisory commission be chosen?**

The citizen’s advisory commission will be chosen by the Office of the Allegheny County Children’s Fund based on three criteria:

- Demonstrated commitment to the wellbeing of all children across Allegheny County

- Familiarity with the three program areas – early learning, after school and nutrition
- Ensuring the representation of a diverse group of community delegates

**How will the Allegheny County Children’s Fund be accountable to the public?**

The proposed charter amendment calls for a third-party to conduct annual financial audits. Additionally, each year the Office of the Allegheny County Children’s Fund and the citizens’ advisory commission will conduct performance reviews measuring the progress of the fund toward its established goals. Every five years the staff and advisory commission will conduct an evaluation of its performance and the needs of the children in Allegheny County to ensure they are properly aligned. A public website will report all funding allocations to the community.

**Could this money ever be redirected to another cause?**

No. The proposed charter amendment prohibits the county from using money from the Allegheny County Children’s Fund for other purposes. The proposed charter amendment also calls for a third-party to conduct annual financial audits. A public website will report all funding allocations to the community.

**What will this mean for funds that are already dedicated to these three areas?**

Currently, Allegheny County does not dedicate any funding to early learning programs and nutritious meals. Approximately \$8 million is currently allocated to after school programs. However, this annual funding only allows for a small amount of youth to participate in quality after school programs, and it will likely remain if the Allegheny County Children’s Fund is passed.

**How will equity and inclusion be considered in this fund?**

The proposed Allegheny County Children's Fund is designed to support ALL our children in the county. As the amendment stipulates, resources generated by the fund will be distributed based on need, effectiveness and fair and equitable allocation. This allocation will be a public process, with community oversight, to ensure access to quality services and equitable distribution of funds.

Further, if voters approve the creation of the Allegheny County Children's Fund, it will require policies, standards, strategic plans and goals. Like the resource allocations, these will be subject to public processes because public engagement is at the heart of this work.