



CHICAGO WHITE SOX

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Op Ed

We are best known as Major League Baseball players for the Chicago White Sox, but for the past three seasons we have been pleased to partner with Children's Home + Aid through the "Bring Me Home Campaign" to raise awareness and support for the needs of foster children and families.

Over the last three years, we have had the privilege of spending time with foster children and families. Last season, we met Dewanza, 15, and Elijah, 14, sister and brother, who experienced multiple foster homes before being adopted as teenagers. Although we have experienced the joy of seeing foster children united with loving, permanent families, we have also learned about the 14,000 foster children in Illinois who face extremely difficult odds.

In an effort to close the state's challenging \$9.2 billion budget gap, the General Assembly has recently passed a "Doomsday Budget" that proposes devastating cuts to the state's infrastructure of services for children and families.

Many of the deepest proposed cuts directly target programs designed to protect children. Today, one in six children is at risk for abuse or neglect. If these serious cuts are made, many more at-risk children will suffer.

As the Department of Children and Family Services is faced with cuts of more than \$461 million, the pending outcome for children in foster care is dismal. Children's Home + Aid has received notice that if these proposed cuts go through, caseloads will more than triple—to a staggering ratio of 1 caseworker per 50 foster children.

Foster parents will suffer a 50% reduction in state reimbursement. Faced with this devastating blow to support for the costs of caring for foster children, many foster parents will no longer be able to care for the abused and neglected children they have taken into their homes.

These cuts are short-sighted because many programs for children and families have a proven track record of preventing much bigger and more expensive problems down the road. Studies demonstrate that every dollar invested in human service programs saves taxpayers \$6 to \$8 in future costs on everything from special education and health care to prison and welfare. The short term "savings" the state might produce through these proposed cuts will have significant increased costs to individuals, communities and Illinois in the future.

Now is the time for all of us to step up the plate and do our part for the common good.

As we reach out to the leadership of the General Assembly and the Governor, we ask them to work together to craft a feasible budget plan. The one option that should not be on the table is cutting vital services for children and families.

If each of us contacts our state legislators and demands that they avert this disaster, we can make an enormous difference for the future of Illinois' most vulnerable children.

Jim Thome

Paul Konerko

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