

VOTE 4 KIDS: Make Children & Families a Top Priority
During the Election Campaign.

During the election season, candidates do a lot of talking. They talk about their priorities and the kinds of legislation they intend to champion. They tend to tailor their message to the audience they are addressing at the moment. Who is their audience? Sometimes it is YOU! Your job is to make sure that candidates are talking about the issues that matter to you – issues that impact the lives of children and families in the U. S. Virgin Islands – and to make your voting decisions on the basis of where the candidates stand.

It's not always easy: children's issues are not often at the top of the list of things political candidates want to talk about. After all, kids don't vote or make campaign contributions. That's why it is imperative that those of us who care deeply about kids and families do our best to make their vital issues an important part of the electoral campaign debate and discussion.

So, here are some suggested questions you might want to ask your candidates if you attend a forum, fish fry, or just meet them on the street:

- Research has shown that children who experience high quality early care and education in their young lives, are more likely to become successful adults and less likely to become high school dropouts, incarcerated, or to be on public support systems. *What are your thoughts on the quality of early care and education in the Territory, and what measures would you support to improve the quality of early care for young children?*
- The 2009 USVI KIDS COUNT Data Book, which is the most recent report, indicates that our 2007 rate of juvenile violent crime arrests (of 539 per 100,000 children between the ages of 10 - 17 years) far exceeds the national rate (of 301 per 100,000 children) -- and that that rate has continued rising since 2001. *What are your thoughts on possible causes for this high rate, and what measures would you support to improve the rate of juvenile violent crime activity?*
- According to the 2009 KIDS COUNT Data Book, in 2007, 58.3% of VI youth age 18 – 19 did not have a high school diploma, and 17% of all 16 – 19 year olds were neither attending school nor working. *What measures would you support to strengthen our education system and keep kids in school, and to enhance employment opportunities for youth when they have completed school?*
- KIDS COUNT 2009 reports that that the VI Department of Human Services referred 380 children for physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect in 2007, up from 348 children in 2006. *How would you approach the Territory's efforts to prevent child maltreatment, and what strategies would you recommend for improving child welfare services?*
- Although VI family median income rose to \$42,673.00 in 2007 (the highest measured during the last 10 years), it still is far below the nation's family median income of \$58,480.00 during the same year. Additionally, the VI reported a child poverty rate of 34.1% in 2007. *Given the current economic state of affairs in the Territory, what budget cuts would you support? What revenue generating measures would you propose? What measures would you propose to reduce the rate of child poverty in the Territory?*

Remember, it's up to you to make sure that the issues candidates talk about are the ones that are important to YOU! Ask the questions, ponder the answers, and then on November 2nd use your informed decisions to vote for the candidates that you believe will work to improve the lives of children and families in the Territory.