

## CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS

---

### A CHILD IMPACT STATEMENT

Typically, a child impact statement describes how a proposed policy would potentially affect children and their rights. Most modern child impact statements derive from the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924 which states *“the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth.”*

Writing such impact statements will ensure that children and young people below voting age are positively and systematically considered when it comes to policy formulation and legislation.

### KEY REASONS FOR CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS

**Children are disenfranchised.** Although children are recognized as citizens in their own right, since they cannot vote they are largely excluded from the political process. Child impact statements will help ensure that their best interests are promoted and protected.

**Our government structures and processes can sometimes fail children.** Policies affecting children are frequently fragmented across a number of government departments and agencies, and their interests are often secondary to other more influential policy agendas. This low level of visibility and lack of coherence and coordination of policy can be addressed through the implementation of child impact statements.

**Children are disproportionately affected by government policy and provision.** Many, if not all, of the issues that come before the Shelby County Board of Commissioners have a direct or indirect impact on the well-being of children and youth in our community. Given that children represent one of the largest groups in our community and are still in the process of growth and maturation, they are both quantitatively and qualitatively more vulnerable to the positive and negative effects of government activity.

**Good policies which have a positive impact on children today are an investment in our future.** The financial and social costs of poor policy, resulting in a failure to secure children’s healthy development, are high. The implementation of child impact statements can have the opposite effect and help bring about policy changes for the betterment of children, the most vulnerable members of our community.

## **CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS IN SHELBY COUNTY**

Child Impact Statements are designed to improve the quality of information available to Shelby County decision makers. Oftentimes, political decisions are influenced by more than objective information. It is important, therefore, that policy-makers fully understand the consequences - the costs, benefits and distributional effects - of their decisions.

The Shelby County Commission approved the use of child impact statements in a February 2008 resolution which stated the necessity to “develop a mechanism for the production of Child Impact Statements to accompany strategically selected resolutions and issues brought for consideration by the Shelby County Board of Commissioners and Administration.”

## **AN EXAMPLE OF CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS IN THE US**

**The State of Missouri:** In 1998, during Missouri’s 89<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Representative Patrick Dougherty introduced House Bill #1885 proposing that child impact statements be prepared to determine:

- a. Whether children’s emotional, physical, intellectual, and financial needs and access to resources would be affected by proposed legislation.
- b. Whether specific groups of children would be impacted more than others by proposed legislation.
- c. Whether proposed legislation would have an impact on parents and caregivers in their ability to ensure children’s emotional, physical, intellectual, and financial well being.

Although the bill did not pass, the concept was informally adopted and used as a practice by the current Missouri Assembly.

## **AN EXAMPLE OF CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS AROUND THE WORLD**

**United Kingdom:** The Council of Europe, which works under the European Court of Human Rights, developed child impact statements as one way of complying with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that insists all children under 18 have the right to have their needs considered when decisions are made that would ultimately impact on them.

**Northern Ireland:** In 2001, the Northern Ireland Assembly adopted a Children’s Commissioner Bill. From 2001 until 2003, child impact statements were required for any policy or legislation deemed by the Children’s Commissioner to affect children. In 2004, Ireland revamped child impact statements under the National Children’s Strategy. Through this new policy, all departments must now identify the impact of their policies on children when seeking government decisions and must include child impact analyses in their departmental strategy statements.