

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE ON  
THE CARE OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN  
HELD AT WASHINGTON, D. C.  
JANUARY 25, 26, 1909; SPECIAL  
MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT OF UNITED  
STATES THEODORE ROOSEVELT**

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Proceedings of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children Held at Washington, D. C.  
January 25, 26, 1909; Special Message of the President of United States Theodore Roosevelt by  
House of Congress

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# HOUSE OF CONGRESS

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MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT OF UNITED  
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CONFERENCE ON THE CARE OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN  
CALLED BY PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT  
JANUARY 25TH AND 26TH, 1909  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
**CONFERENCE ON THE CARE  
OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN**

HELD AT WASHINGTON, D. C.  
JANUARY 25, 26, 1909

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SPECIAL MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT OF UNITED STATES  
RECOMMENDING LEGISLATION DESIRED BY THE CONFER-  
ENCE ON THE CARE OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN, HELD  
JANUARY 25 AND 26, 1909, AT WASHINGTON, D. C., AND  
TRANSMITTING THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE

COMMUNICATED TO THE TWO HOUSES OF CONGRESS  
ON FEBRUARY 15, 1909: SECOND SESSION  
OF THE SIXTIETH CONGRESS



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## SPECIAL MESSAGE.

### *To the Senate and House of Representatives :*

On January 25-26, 1909, there assembled in this city, on my invitation, a conference on the care of dependent children. To this conference there came from nearly every State in the Union men and women actively engaged in the care of dependent children, and they represented all the leading religious bodies.

The subject considered is one of high importance to the well-being of the nation. The Census Bureau reported in 1904 that there were in orphanages and children's homes about 93,000 dependent children. There are probably 50,000 more (the precise number never having been ascertained) in private homes, either on board or in adopted homes provided by the generosity of foster parents. In addition to these there were 25,000 children in institutions for juvenile delinquents.

Each of these children represents either a potential addition to the productive capacity and the enlightened citizenship of the nation, or, if allowed to suffer from neglect, a potential addition to the destructive forces of the community. The ranks of criminals and other enemies of society are recruited in an altogether undue proportion from children bereft of their natural homes and left without sufficient care.

The interests of the nation are involved in the welfare of this army of children no less than in our great material affairs.

Notwithstanding a wide diversity of views and methods represented in the conference, and notwithstanding the varying legislative enactments and policies of the States from which the members came, the conference, at the close of its sessions, unanimously adopted a series of declarations expressing the conclusions which they had reached. These constitute a wise, constructive, and progressive programme of child-caring work. If given full effect by the proper agencies, existing methods and practices in almost every community would be profoundly and advantageously modified.

More significant even than the contents of the declarations is the fact that they were adopted without dissenting vote and with every demonstration of hearty approval on the part of all present. They constitute a standard of accepted opinion by which each community should measure the adequacy of its existing methods and to which each community should seek to conform its legislation and its practice.

The keynote of the conference was expressed in these words:

Home life is the highest and finest product of civilization. Children should not be deprived of it except for urgent and compelling reasons.

Surely poverty alone should not disrupt the home. Parents of good character suffering from temporary misfortune, and above all deserving mothers fairly well able to work but deprived of the support of the normal breadwinner, should be given such aid as may be

necessary to enable them to maintain suitable homes for the rearing of their children. The widowed or deserted mother, if a good woman, willing to work and to do her best, should ordinarily be helped in such fashion as will enable her to bring up her children herself in their natural home. Children from unfit homes, and children who have no homes, who must be cared for by charitable agencies, should, so far as practicable, be cared for in families.

I transmit herewith for your information a copy of the conclusions reached by the conference, of which the following is a brief summary:

1. *Home care.*—Children of worthy parents or deserving mothers should, as a rule, be kept with their parents at home.
2. *Preventive work.*—The effort should be made to eradicate causes of dependency, such as disease and accident, and to substitute compensation and insurance for relief.
3. *Home finding.*—Homeless and neglected children, if normal, should be cared for in families, when practicable.
4. *Cottage system.*—Institutions should be on the cottage plan with small units, as far as possible.
5. *Incorporation.*—Agencies caring for dependent children should be incorporated, on approval of a suitable state board.
6. *State inspection.*—The State should inspect the work of all agencies which care for dependent children.
7. *Inspection of educational work.*—Educational work of institutions and agencies caring for dependent children should be supervised by state educational authorities.
8. *Facts and records.*—Complete histories of dependent children and their parents, based upon personal investigation and supervision, should be recorded for guidance of child-caring agencies.
9. *Physical care.*—Every needy child should receive the best medical and surgical attention, and be instructed in health and hygiene.
10. *Cooperation.*—Local child-caring agencies should cooperate and establish joint bureaus of information.
11. *Undesirable legislation.*—Prohibitive legislation against transfer of dependent children between States should be repealed.
12. *Permanent organization.*—A permanent organization for work along the lines of these resolutions is desirable.
13. *Federal children's bureau.*—Establishment of a federal children's bureau is desirable, and enactment of pending bill is earnestly recommended.
14. Suggests special message to Congress favoring federal children's bureau and other legislation applying above principles to District of Columbia and other federal territory.

While it is recognized that these conclusions can be given their fullest effect only by the action of the several States or communities concerned, or of their charitable agencies, the conference requested me, in section 14 of the conclusions, to send to you a message recommending federal action.

There are pending in both Houses of Congress bills for the establishment of a children's bureau, i. e., Senate bill No. 8323 and House bill No. 24148. These provide for a children's bureau in the Department of the Interior, which

shall investigate and report upon all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life, and shall especially investigate the questions of infant mortality, the birth rate, physical degeneracy, orphanage, juvenile delinquency and juvenile courts, desertion and illegitimacy, dangerous occupations, accidents and diseases of children of the working classes, employment, legislation affecting children in the several States and Territories, and such other facts as have a bearing upon the health, efficiency, character, and training of children.

One of the needs felt most acutely by the conference was that of accurate information concerning these questions relating to childhood. The National Government not only has the unquestioned right of research in such vital matters, but is the only agency which can effectively conduct such general inquiries as are needed for the