

THE CHILDREN'S BUDGET COALITION

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

March 24, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510
317 Russell Senate Office Building

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510
322 Hart Senate Office Building

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
1236 Longworth House Office Building

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 0515
2468 Rayburn House Office Building

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As members of the Children's Budget Coalition, comprised of over 80 advocacy organizations dedicated to prioritizing children and families in federal policy and budget decisions, we were pleased to see Congress pass the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R.6201) and the president sign it into law on Wednesday, March 18, 2020. We appreciate your leadership to ensure the swift passage of that bill. While H.R.6201 is a reasonable, initial down payment to address the Coronavirus crisis, Congress must enact bigger and bolder measures to aid our nation's children and address the mounting unmet needs of low- and moderate-income families during this emergency. As the Coronavirus spreads widely, captures our undivided attention, and threatens our health, it forces us to alter our behavior in significant ways. The resulting school and business closures, layoffs, and loss of or reduced income for millions of households call for aggressive measures to protect American children and families. As a result, we write to urge Congress to prioritize children and low- and moderate-income families as you develop additional, comprehensive emergency response legislation in the coming days and weeks.

This public health crisis continues to grow and impact lives throughout the United States and around the globe and dramatically compounds the difficult decisions families living in poverty make on a regular basis. For those who already lack the financial stability to consistently access nutritious food, stable housing, healthcare, child care, and other essential supports to ensure a child's healthy development and well-being, they now face additional hurdles to make ends meet during this public health and economic emergency. We call on Congress to provide those who need it most with immediate and direct cash assistance, and additional relief is warranted in critical areas of healthcare, housing assistance, child welfare, education support, child care assistance, and more in order to protect the health of all children and families across the country. As different proposals emerge to address the Coronavirus crisis, we believe both policy changes and the rapid availability of federal resources would help to ensure some household financial stability for many low-income and vulnerable populations during these times of grave uncertainty.

As members of the Children’s Budget Coalition, we raise our collective voice to urge you to act in the following ways:

- Implement an immediate and direct cash assistance program of at least \$2,000 that prioritizes children and is available to **all** children who need it most. The direct cash support should be robust and on scale with the crisis, reach those quickly who need it most, including those with no income, and available in timely payments until the economy recovers. It also should not result in the unintended exclusion of babies and young people who would qualify now, but would not have been eligible in 2018. We know that an immediate cash-transfer to low-and middle-income families during this public health emergency will help to address the loss of income too many households are experiencing now, and others will endure as the economy continues to slow down, businesses close and layoffs occur;
- Expand the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to help ensure some household financial stability for many low- income and vulnerable populations during these times of grave uncertainty;
- Provide emergency cash assistance to families through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program;
- Increase the Medicaid FMAP by at least twelve percent;
- Mandate 12-month continuous eligibility in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP);
- Reduce enrollment barriers and red tape for enrollment in Medicaid and CHIP;
- Enroll newborns without alternative coverage in Medicaid automatically;
- Provide Medicaid coverage to any population not currently eligible;
- Provide a 15% increase in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for every household enrolled in the program and continue such benefits for as long as our economy is struggling. SNAP is more critical than ever to ensure that families and our children across the country have the resources they need to put food on their table and they can do so safely during this public health and economic crisis;
- Fund McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) at \$500 million and allow for broader use of funds to meet the temporary housing, health, safety, transportation, and educational needs of homeless children and youth, including the unique needs of young children, unaccompanied youth, children and youth with disabilities, and English Language Learners;
- Increase Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs by \$128 million and bypass the current competitive grant process and distribute to existing grantees;
- Increase the Service Connect for Youth on the Streets program by \$22 million and also bypass the current competitive grant process and distribute to existing grantees;
- Ensure that colleges and universities create plans to support students experiencing homelessness or housing instability during campus shutdowns;
- Boost Title IV-E Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Chafee) funds above the current level of \$143 million and temporarily waive the 30 percent Chafee housing cap for the duration of the crisis in order to provide additional support for living independent services for current and former foster youth;

- Require a percent point FMAP increase for Title IV-E to match the Medicaid FMAP increase to support children and families in the child welfare system. We appreciate the increase provided in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. We are likely to face unpredictable challenges in our nation's foster care, adoption assistance, and kinship care programs requiring increased support for these families and the caseworkers serving them. Any added funding will help address these challenges;
- Boost Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) funding to \$500 million for CAPTA state grants and \$1 billion for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention programs (CBCAP) to help prevent maltreatment. Expanded CBCAP funding will provide critical investments in community-based service providers who can adopt a public health approach to prevention, allowing them to provide additional family support across a wide range of challenges. Expanded state grant funding can be utilized for worker support, technology investments and other infrastructure supports during the crisis;
- Increase funding by \$1 billion under the Title IV-B, Part 2, the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF). Additional investments in prevention are needed at this time to eliminate the need for out-of-home placements, both to protect children and to prevent the child welfare system from being overwhelmed by the crisis. Title IV-B, Part 2 is a critical funding source for stabilizing families, foster parents, and other prevention efforts for states to have the infrastructure and capacity to distribute and utilize PSSF funds efficiently enough to meet this crisis;
- Implement a moratorium on evictions nationwide;
- Increase access to civil legal services for families facing evictions after moratoriums are lifted, or if moratoriums are not put into effect;
- Suspend the operation of the public charge rule for the duration of the crisis and ensure that no medical services utilized during the crisis apply to any reinstated rule;
- Provide significant and flexible emergency funding of \$50 billion for child care and \$2 billion for Early Head Start and Head Start programs to weather the growing public health and economic crisis and preserve the nation's supply of family child care, community-based child care, and early learning programs;
- Support \$100 million for the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program to reach families facing new challenges and needs during this crisis and to enable remote home visits;
- Include financial recovery support for afterschool providers now, this summer, and into the fall as learning programs will need to be able to accommodate more children, and additional programs will need to ensure quality learning opportunities are available for those who are most at risk during school closures, including those who may be particularly vulnerable to the inefficiencies of virtual learning;
- Provide \$500 million increase in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers to meet the increased need for summer learning and afterschool programs when activities resume to help students at risk for learning loss this spring;
- Accelerate efforts to address technology gaps and access to broadband and devices for students and families;
- Improve access to behavioral health care by offering regulatory flexibility for teletherapy and telepsychiatry and ensuring reimbursement through Medicaid; and

- Ensure equitable treatment for all workers by including state and local government agencies in the benefits of payroll tax credits for “emergency paid leave” for our public employees affected by the coronavirus.

As this emergency continues to unfold, we recognize that additional federal action is necessary to support our children and families during this public health and economic crisis. We appreciate your consideration of our concerns and recommendations and stand ready to work with you during this emergency.

Sincerely,

1000 Days

Afterschool Alliance

Alliance for Strong Families and Communities

American Psychological Association

Campaign for Youth Justice

Center for Healthy Housing

Children’s Health Fund

Child Welfare League of America

Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York

Coalition for Juvenile Justice

Every Child Matters

Family Centered Treatment Foundation

Families USA

First Focus Campaign for Children

Institute for Educational Leadership

MomsRising

National Association of School Nurses

National WIC Association

Public Advocacy for Kids

Save The Children Action Network

SchoolHouse Connection

Share Our Strength

The School Superintendents Association

United Way Worldwide