

THE CHILDREN'S BUDGET COALITION

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

February 4, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

We, the undersigned members of the Children's Budget Coalition, are writing to urge you as congressional leaders to prioritize children and families in this fiscal year's appropriations process. The Children's Budget Coalition is comprised of over 80 child and family advocacy organizations who are dedicated to ensuring that children and families receive the federal funding that they need to thrive.

Unfortunately, spending on children has not kept pace with growing need in recent years. The share of federal spending on children declined to an all-time low of just 7.21 percent in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, which represents a 10 percent decline since FY 2015.¹ At the same time, issues like child poverty remain a persistent problem. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau recently confirmed that child poverty remains high, with a rate of 16.2 percent, and children continue to experience poverty at rates far higher than adults. As child advocates, we know that meaningful and comprehensive investments in the many discretionary programs that serve our communities and families help lift children out of poverty, achieve household financial stability, and improve our nation's economic health. That being said, it is now more important than ever to secure crucial investments in children during the federal appropriations process in the form of adequate top-line caps that do not shortchange non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs, robust 302(b) allocations for bills serving the majority of children's programs, and timely passage of bills to avoid harmful disruptions in funding.

Last year's Bipartisan Budget Act (H.R.3877) brought welcome spending increases over the next two fiscal years; however, the agreement mostly front-loaded these increases into FY 2020. The deal caps discretionary spending increases for FY 2021 at less than .4 percent, or \$5 billion, which is a far cry from FY2020's increase of about 4 percent. This leaves children's programs competing for sparse funding increases with other important funding priorities, such as vital services for veterans. For example, leaving the VA Mission Act under the caps would cause all other NDD spending to fall by about 1 percent in FY 2021. Congress should consider a special cap exemption that provides a

¹ "Key Takeaways from Children's Budget 2019," *First Focus on Children*. 10 September 2019. <https://firstfocus.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Key-Takeaways-from-Childrens-Budget-2019.pdf>. Accessed 22 January 2020.

sustainable source of funding for critical programs supporting our nation's children and struggling families as well as our veterans during FY 2021 funding negotiations. An investment in the health and well-being of the next generation is an investment in our nation's future, and we must ensure that budget shortfalls do not hamper these priorities.

We also ask that Congress emphasize healthy 302(b) allocations for appropriations bills that house the most programs serving children and families. Specifically, the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education (Labor-H), Agriculture-Food and Drug Administration (Ag-FDA), Commerce-Justice-Science (CJS), and Transportation-Housing and Urban Development (T-HUD) appropriations bills together accounted for 98.82 percent of NDD spending on children in FY2019. To reverse the unfortunate trends in spending on children, Congress must provide these bills with adequate funding to meet the growing needs of our nation's youth.

Furthermore, the importance of passing appropriations bills on time is especially significant for programs serving children. While much of spending on adults is mandatory, spending on children is disproportionately discretionary.² This reality makes funding for programs serving children and families subject to yearly review and renewal through the appropriations process, thus disproportionately exposing them to the risk of government shutdowns and continuing resolutions (CR's). The historic government shutdown experienced in early FY2019 seriously harmed the economic security, health, and well-being of low-income children and families who participate in vital government programs. Similarly, the recent pattern of using stopgap measures to fund the government has created unpredictable and inadequate program funding that fails to keep pace with inflation and inhibits agencies from planning ahead to address the pressing needs of our children and families. We hope that Congress halts this recent trend in FY2021 by returning to regular order and coming together to fund the government in a timely manner.

Although stopgap measures were necessary for FY2020, we were pleased to see a final outcome that was bipartisan and provided key investments in children. We hope Congress can build on this work during this fiscal year, and the Children's Budget Coalition stands ready to work with you on making critical investments in our nation's children and future.

Signed,

1,000 Days
Afterschool Alliance
American Academy of Pediatrics
Campaign for Youth Justice
Child Care Aware of America
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Advocacy Institute

² "Budgeting for the Next Generation: Does the Budget Process Prioritize Children?" *Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget*. 16 August 2018. http://www.crfb.org/sites/default/files/Does_The_Budget_Process_Prioritize_Children.pdf. Accessed 22 January 2020.

Children's Aid
Children's Health Fund
Children's Hospital Association
City Year Inc.
Coalition for Human Needs
Communities in Schools
Family Focused Treatment Association
First Focus Campaign for Children
Jumpstart
Mental Health America
National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Center for Healthy Housing
National Child Care Association
National Diaper Bank Network
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reforms
National Network for Youth
National Respite Coalition
National WIC Association
Nurse-Family Partnership
Prevent Blindness
Public Advocacy for Kids
Save the Children Action Network
SchoolHouse Connection
Share Our Strength
United Way Worldwide
YMCA of the USA
Youth Villages

CC: The Honorable Nita Lowey
The Honorable Kay Granger
The Honorable Richard Shelby
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

THE CHILDREN'S BUDGET COALITION

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

February 4, 2020

The Honorable Donald Trump
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Mick Mulvaney
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear President Trump and Director Mulvaney:

As you finalize your Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 budget request, we, the undersigned members of the Children's Budget Coalition, are writing to urge you to prioritize robust funding for programs and services benefitting children and struggling families. The Children's Budget Coalition is comprised of over 80 child and family advocacy organizations who are dedicated to ensuring that children and families receive the federal funding that they need to thrive.

Children represent nearly a quarter of America's population, yet the federal share of spending on children under your FY 2020 budget request was only 6.45 percent.¹ Alarmingly, spending on children has not kept pace with growing need in recent years. Another budget request that shortchanges resources going to children could lead to additional spending cuts that result in direct, negative impacts on children in both the short- and long-term. First Focus on Children's *2019 Children's Budget* publication presented some extremely troubling data:

- Nearly 83 percent of children who receive free or reduced-price lunch during the school year do not have access to the summer meals program.
- For the first time in years, the rate of uninsured children increased to 5 percent in 2017.
- There was a 52 percent increase in the prevalence of teen nicotine vaping between 2017 and 2018.
- Between 2006 and 2016, there was a 100 percent increase in the number of homeless children and youth identified in America's public schools.
- Of the households on the waiting list for housing assistance, 60 percent are families with children.
- Almost 80 percent of eligible 3-5-year-old children lack access to Head Start programs.
- The Federal Government is not fulfilling 55 percent of its funding commitment for Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) grants.
- One in five children in foster care will become instantly homeless upon aging out of the system.

On top of this startling information, the share of federal spending on children declined to an all-time low of just 7.21 percent in FY 2019, which represents a 10 percent decline since FY 2015.² At the same

¹ "Key Takeaways from Children's Budget 2019," *First Focus on Children*. 10 September 2019. <https://firstfocus.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Key-Takeaways-from-Childrens-Budget-2019.pdf>. Accessed 22 January 2020.

² Ibid.

time, issues like child poverty remain a persistent problem. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau recently confirmed that child poverty remains high, with a rate of 16.2 percent, and children continue to experience poverty at rates far higher than adults. Last year the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine released a landmark study, *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*, which confirms that child poverty is a solvable problem when there is the political will to address it and cites research confirming that the adverse outcomes associated with child poverty directly result from a lack of income.³ As child advocates, we know that meaningful and comprehensive investments in the many discretionary and mandatory programs that serve our communities and families help lift children out of poverty, achieve household financial stability, and improve our nation's economic health. You have a pivotal opportunity to demonstrate that this administration places a high value on our children's well-being by requesting crucial, increased investments in our nation's children and future.

Last year's Bipartisan Budget Act (H.R.3877) brought welcome spending increases over the next two fiscal years; however, the agreement mostly front-loaded these increases into FY 2020. The deal caps discretionary spending increases for FY 2021 at less than .4 percent, or \$5 billion, which is a far cry from FY2020's increase of about 4 percent. This leaves children's programs competing for sparse funding increases with other important funding priorities, such as vital services for veterans. For example, leaving the VA Mission Act under the caps would cause all other NDD spending to fall by about 1 percent in FY 2021. Your leadership in crafting a path forward to support critical programs and services benefitting children and families in FY2021 would send a very strong signal to members of Congress that investments in the health and well-being of the next generation are an investment in our nation's future.

While much of federal spending on adults is mandatory, spending on children is disproportionately discretionary.⁴ The historic government shutdown experienced in early 2019 seriously harmed the economic security, health, and well-being of low-income children and families who participate in vital government programs. Although stopgap measures were necessary for FY2020, we were pleased to see a final outcome that was bipartisan and provided key investments in children. We hope your FY2021 budget request can build on this bipartisan work, and the Children's Budget Coalition stands ready to work with you on making critical investments in our nation's children and future.

Signed,

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Afterschool Alliance
American Academy of Pediatrics
Campaign for Youth Justice
Child Care Aware of America

³ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2019. *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*, The National Academies Press, 2019. <https://www.nap.edu/read/25246/chapter/1>

⁴ "Budgeting for the Next Generation: Does the Budget Process Prioritize Children?" *Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget*. 16 August 2018. http://www.crfb.org/sites/default/files/Does_The_Budget_Process_Prioritize_Children.pdf. Accessed 22 January 2020.

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