

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

I am writing from First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal budget and policy decisions, to ask you to please prioritize the well-being of children in America as you respond to the Coronavirus outbreak.

As the spread of the Coronavirus has grown, the vulnerabilities within our system have become clear. Children and families living in poverty already lack the financial stability to consistently access nutritious food, stable housing, healthcare, and all of the resources needed to support a child's healthy development. A public health crisis only exacerbates these needs when resources are scarce for everyone.

As schools close, businesses close or reduce hours, consumers stay home, and events are canceled, low-income household budgets are being stretched even thinner and children's healthy development is at risk as children miss meals and other resources usually provided in school, and parents miss paychecks due to reduced work hours or lack of childcare. The urgent need to provide low-income families with immediate resources to meet basic needs becomes alarmingly apparent.

For children, youth, and families also experiencing homelessness, there are additional safety concerns. The majority of children and youth experiencing homelessness in the United States are not in shelters but moving between different temporary situations that include living doubled-up with others or run-down motels. When schools close, children and youth are in these overcrowded and stressful environments all day without many resources. This not only makes quarantining nearly impossible, but these unstable situations also put children and youth at increased risk of predation, trafficking, and abuse.

Undoubtedly, the Coronavirus outbreak requires increased investment in underfunded programs that benefit low-income families, children, and vulnerable populations in order to solve it. In particular, it is critical that we provide immediate and direct cash

assistance to households with children so they can cover basic everyday needs such as housing costs, groceries, and medicine.

We applaud Congress for passing the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and now urge Congress to again act quickly to provide additional and immediate economic relief in the form of increased access to healthcare, direct cash transfers, housing assistance, education support, child care assistance and more in order to protect the health of all children and families in the United States and provide households with some financial stability to weather times of uncertainty.

We ask for you to act in the following ways:

- Implement an immediate and direct cash assistance program of at least \$2,000 that prioritizes children and 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. Expansion of the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit also would help to 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 ten percentage points;
- 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;
- Increase Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for every household enrolled in the program;
- 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;
- 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;
- Significant and flexible emergency funding that will allow child care and Head Start programs to weather the growing public health and economic crisis and preserve the nation's supply of family child care and community-based child care programs;
- Ensure emergency child care funding includes for public health workers and first responders;
- Accelerate efforts to address technology gaps and access to broadband and devices for students and families.

As this situation continues to evolve, we know that additional support will be needed for children and families struggling with this crisis. We look forward to continuing to engage with you on how to prioritize the well-being of all of our nation's children.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bruce Lesley

CC: All Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate