

November 17, 2022

Dear Members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives:

Children and those who care for them are struggling in all aspects of their lives, from health risks to rising costs to threats like climate change. For too long, children have not received the investments or prioritization in policy decisions that they need and deserve. **We write to call on you to make children the priority in any of the legislative vehicles that Congress considers before the end of the year.**

The 117th Congress started its session strong by passing the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which included incredible investments for children. As a result, FY2022 set a record in the share of spending for children in the federal budget: [11.98% percent](#) of federal funding went to children, compared to the historic low of 7.47% in FY2020. U.S. Census Bureau data showed that these investments led to the [lowest child poverty rate on record](#) for the United States. Furthermore, the House of Representatives passed the Build Back Better Act, which promised to be the most important piece of legislation for children and families ever by building on the progress made under ARPA. Unfortunately, that bill was not made into law, and children paid the price.

The Inflation Reduction Act included important investments to address climate change that are critical for children, but it failed to address the many issues that currently threaten children's health and well-being. While the Build Back Better Act had 436 meaningful mentions of children with investments in child care, maternal and child health, child poverty reduction and more, the Inflation Reduction Act had only **one** meaningful mention of children. Now, before the end of the legislative session, Congress has an opportunity to leave a legacy of championing children by continuing the upward trend in investments for kids and passing policy that will advance children's well-being today and for years to come.

The American people are united in their support for children. In a May 2022 poll conducted by Lake Research Partners, only months before the midterms, voters of all demographics and political persuasions [agreed that our country must increase](#) investments in children and prioritize their needs in public policy, with education, child protection, health coverage, mental health, hunger, homelessness, and poverty leading their concern. Congress must follow the lead of the American people by taking action that improves the lives of children. An end-of-year package should include provisions that address:

- Expansion of the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit
- Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Permanency and Continuous Eligibility
- Children's Mental Health Workforce and Infrastructure
- Child Care and Early Learning

- Home Visiting Reauthorization
- Child Nutrition Reauthorization
- Permanent Protections for Immigrant Youth
- International Children's Issues
- Improved Prevention of and Response to Child Abuse and Trafficking
- Advancing Effective Youth Justice Reforms

We underscore all these child-related policies because children need decisive, comprehensive action. Now is the time for Congress to commit to creating a country in which every child can live a safe and healthy life and reach their full potential. We look forward to working with you to tackle all the issues below and any others that advance the health, safety, and well-being of all children.

Sincerely

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

Bruce Lesley  
President

### *Children's Issue Areas*

#### **Expansion of the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit**

The historic and transformational improvements to the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) in 2021 proved to wield extraordinary power to help solve the long-standing child poverty crisis and build a foundation for all our children and youth to thrive and succeed. [The improvements to the CTC are largely responsible for nearly cutting our national child poverty rate in half in 2021](#), lifting nearly 3 million children — including 1 million children under age 6 — above the poverty line. Combined, the [refundable credits lifted nearly 5 million children out of](#) poverty last year. With the expiration of these unprecedented tax investments, every aspect of children's lives is harmed as child poverty and hunger spike and families struggle to pay monthly bills and afford basic necessities. We strongly urge you to enhance the CTC and EITC in any end-of-the-year tax policy decisions and prioritize children and youth in households who face the biggest barriers to economic security, for every child deserves the resources they need to thrive.

The CTC and the EITC enhancements enacted under the ARPA increased the credits amount and broadened eligibility. [The expanded CTC is estimated to reach nearly 40 million households with over 65 million children](#). The ARPA made the CTC fully refundable for the first time, extending its [potential reach to nearly one-third of our children](#) who had been left behind because their parents earned too little. This full refundability provision disproportionately benefits children of color, young children, single parents with young children, and those who reside in rural areas. In addition, advanced monthly CTC payments were authorized and began in July 2021. After these advanced payments ended at the end of 2021, [roughly 4 million children slipped back into poverty in January](#). [Over 130 economists called for the reinstatement of the Child Tax Credit payments](#) as one of the most efficient and direct approaches to help offset inflationary pressures and concurred that the CTC would *not* increase inflation.

The EITC expansion nearly tripled the amount of the credit for low-income workers and broadened the eligibility age from 25 to 18 for youth who experience foster care and homelessness, even while these young people are full-time students. [The EITC improvements have the potential to benefit over 17 million workers](#), including an estimated 380,000 to 500,000 former foster youth. This cash benefit can help young people pay for transportation to and from job training, school or community-based support. The EITC and CTC tax credit improvements also helped to [narrow the racial poverty gap](#), reducing poverty levels for Black, Hispanic, Asian and American Indian, and Alaska Native children, but a sizeable gap remains. Families in Puerto Rico, immigrant households, first-time taxpayers, and others continue to face barriers to access the credits, and every child deserves resources to help ensure they can reach their full potential. Congress faces a pivotal moment of opportunity to do right by our nation's children. We urge you to prioritize the renewal of these successful tax credit enhancements this session over tax breaks for large corporations as you negotiate tax policy provisions during the closing weeks of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress.

#### **Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Permanency and Continuous Eligibility**

CHIP ensures access to high-quality, affordable, pediatric-appropriate health care for children in working families. CHIP has played a critical role in reducing the number of uninsured children

by more than 68 percent, from an uninsurance rate of nearly 15 percent in 1997 to [less than five percent](#) in 2016, while [improving health outcomes](#) and access to care for children and pregnant women. CHIP, together with Medicaid, plays a particularly important role for children of color: in the first 6 months of 2020, [more than half](#) of Black, multi-racial, and Hispanic children relied on Medicaid and CHIP as their source of health coverage. Congress must prioritize CHIP as a critical part of the health insurance system for children; delaying CHIP permanency will cost billions of more dollars down the line.

Continuous eligibility for children and adults in CHIP and Medicaid ensures that they [will remain eligible](#) for Medicaid coverage or for CHIP for a one-year period, regardless of changes in their family's income. Children with health coverage are [more likely](#) to show improved health, lower rates of disability, and greater financial security in adulthood, and continuous coverage helps to avoid issues of delayed care and unfilled prescriptions caused by gaps in insurance coverage. By guaranteeing continuous Medicaid or CHIP eligibility for children in every state, Congress can advance health equity by promoting continuity of treatment for low-income children who experience [disproportionate rates](#) of health disparities.

### **Children's Mental Health Workforce and Infrastructure**

We urge Congress to build upon the investments it made in the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act in July 2022, to grow the mental health workforce to be able to meet the increasing needs of children and teens in crisis. More workforce grants specific for pediatrics to support the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce across pediatric behavioral health professional fields is a top priority. We need more community-based mental health dollars designated for pediatric care, including in mobile crisis response. Finally, in response to the increasing numbers of children who have turned to emergency rooms for mental health services, we urge Congress to provide resources to support efforts to scale up inpatient care capacity, including costs associated with the conversion of general beds to accommodate youth mental health patients.

### **Child Care and Early Learning**

Members of Congress in both parties have recognized the critical role high-quality child care and early learning programs play in supporting children's healthy development, learning, and school readiness; supporting parents' ability to work, train, or pursue an education; and creating vital jobs for early learning professionals. However, too many families continue to struggle to find and afford high-quality care that meets their needs and early learning professionals often make wages far too low to survive on. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges. We believe that significant investments and structural changes are needed to address long-standing challenges in child care and early learning. In order to address some shorter-term challenges though, we ask you to include the largest possible increases in FY2023 appropriations for several specific early learning programs, including an additional \$6.17 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, \$4.4 billion for Head Start, \$435.7 million for the IDEA Part C infant and toddler program, \$105 million for Part B Section 619 preschool programs, and \$210 million for Preschool Development Grants Birth Through Five.

### **Home Visiting Reauthorization**

We urge you to reauthorize the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program during this Congress to provide a five year reauthorization, increased funding of \$200 million annually for a total of \$1.4 billion after five years, a doubling of the Tribal set-aside, and continued allowance of virtual home visiting. MIECHV has allowed home visiting to expand in states to serve more children and families, and it has shown positive outcomes including improved maternal and child health, prevention of child maltreatment, increased family economic self-sufficiency, reduction in crime and intimate partner violence, and the promotion of child development and school readiness. [We endorsed](#) the Jackie Walorski Maternal and Child Home Visiting Reauthorization Act (H.R. 8876), passed out of the Ways and Means Committee unanimously, which addresses many of our priorities including new data disaggregation by race and ethnicity and a focus on the home visiting workforce and its importance to the success of children and their families. We ask that you include MIECHV in your end-of-year package in order to allow this vital program to continue serving children and families.

### **Child Nutrition Reauthorization**

We urge Congress to prioritize passing a comprehensive Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) before the end of this year. The child nutrition programs that serve millions of children nationwide have not been modernized in 12 years. The House's version, the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act, was passed out of committee earlier this summer. We urge the Senate to release their package, which we hope will include important policies from the House component, such as an expansion of the Community Eligibility Provision, modernization of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and an increased authorization level of the Summer EBT program.

### **Permanent Protections for Immigrant Youth**

For the last 10 years, immigrant youth and their families have received life-changing protection from deportation and the ability to work lawfully under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program. However, courts have repeatedly threatened the Program and most recently, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals [ruled that the Program is unlawful](#). The nearly [600,000 U.S. citizen children](#) whose parents have DACA and the thousands of others who could qualify for DACA cannot continue to live in fear of court decisions that put them at risk of being separated from their families and communities and [is harmful to their wellbeing](#). We urge Congress to take action to protect immigrant youth through a pathway to citizenship in any end-of-year package.

### **International Children's Issues**

COVID. Conflict. Climate. These and other global crises are upending the lives of children and youth around the world, making it harder than ever for them to thrive and reach their full potential. In under-resourced parts of the world, this confluence of challenges is undermining decades of progress to improve children's health and well-being. Legislation must address the holistic and developmental needs of children around the globe, including but not limited to mental health (the MINDS Act [H.R. 3988/S. 2015]); education (The Global Learning Loss Assessment Act [H.R. 1500/S. 552], The Keeping Girls in School Act [H.R. 4134/S. 2276], the READ Act Reauthorization Act [H.R. 7240/S. 3938]); food insecurity (The Global Food

Security Reauthorization Act [H.R. 8446/S. 4649]); and equity (The International Children with Disabilities Protection Act [S. 4982]).

### **Improved Prevention of and Response to Child Abuse and Trafficking**

Children who experience abuse are at an increased risk of living through a number of other adverse childhood experiences: sex or labor exploitation, separation from their culture, community, relatives and siblings via foster care, behavioral and mental health crises, or involvement with the criminal justice system. We implore Congress to reauthorize the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in such a manner that allows child victims of trafficking that commit crimes against their abusers to receive the trauma-informed response they need. We also urge Congress to reauthorize the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act so that child victims of abuse and neglect can have access to legal counsel and to enhance Title IV-B funded services so that states can support efforts to connect families to community-based services that prevent abuse. Congress' end of year priorities should also include supporting older youth who are in foster care by continuing the APRA's enhancements to the Earned Income Tax Credits, extending foster care to age 21, and passing the bipartisan H.R. 7932 to help foster youth get driver's licenses and insurance. Lastly, it's important to remember that a strong sense of identity and belonging is a protective factor against many adverse childhood experiences. To that end, we urge Congress to require states to comply with the Indian Child Welfare Act so that Native American children can maintain their connection to their community and culture whenever possible.

### **Advancing Effective Youth Justice Reforms**

Despite inflammatory reports to the contrary, data has shown that juvenile violence has [remained flat](#) or [even decreased](#). The multi-decade approach to youth justice, which includes advancing trauma informed, developmentally-appropriate, community-based response to youth behaviors, has proven itself effective. We urge congress to continue and deepen investments in these delinquency prevention and response approaches by fully funding the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act, ending youth sentences of life without the possibility of parole, closing failed youth prisons, and expanding access to more effective community-based alternatives.