

URGE CONGRESS TO PRIORITIZE CHILDREN IN POLICY AND FUNDING DECISIONS



When it comes to U.S. government funding and programming, children always come last and receive the least. Budget [analysis](#) by First Focus on Children has shown this time and again.

But why is this? It's certainly not because Americans don't care. Indeed, according to a May 2022 Lake Research poll, Americans are deeply concerned about child poverty and believe we spend [too little](#) on children's programs.

And yet our government is slow to prioritize the policies and funding levels that children need to grow up healthy and thrive. Why this disconnect? Why are seniors' programs such as Medicare and Social Security usually off limits from Congressional cuts? Is it because seniors can be counted on to vote and kids cannot yet? Perhaps, but it also can't help that to a large extent, our governmental systems and funding structures are set up to [automatically](#) and regularly ensure seniors have a social safety net, while [withholding](#) the same security from kids.

Recent [coverage](#) of debt ceiling and budget negotiations between President Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy also bring to light the fact that cuts that impact children are often called for using broad, unspecific terminology like "spending caps" and "deficit reduction."

Whatever the reason, we are treating our nation's children poorly, and we need a [paradigm shift](#) in Congress and within our national discourse. This month we will be calling on Congress to make this change and to specifically protect and expand funding for key child well-being programs.

Background:

Childhood is the most [vital](#) window in terms of brain growth and impact on future success. The more we invest in the early years, the [greater](#) benefits to our national GDP over the long term because kids grow up healthier and earn more money. But more important than that, it is the right thing to do — ensuring that all children have nutritious food, good education and access to quality health care will reduce their suffering and boost their quality of life. Unfortunately, our national policies and funding decisions fail to align with what we know about the science of human development and in fact children in the U.S. experience higher rates of poverty than adults.

This year, some in Congress have been pushing for [cutting resources](#) for education, Head Start, child care, child health, and child nutrition, as well as for child and family homelessness and child abuse prevention. They also want to add [harmful](#) work requirements for [nutrition](#), [health care](#) and cash [assistance](#) programs.

Children are already vastly under-funded in our U.S. budget. Slashing programs that provide good food to pregnant women and kids or snatching away their health care is simply cruel and unfair, not to mention economically foolish. Why are poor kids, who get so little in the first place, being made to pay the price for reducing our deficit?

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As First Focus on Children President, Bruce Lesley, says, *"Right now, at this moment, the kids are not alright. In fact, children are in crisis with rising threats to their health, education and early childhood development. They face hunger, homelessness, environmental threats, and rising mortality rates due primarily to gun violence (including rising homicide and suicide rates), and substance abuse poisonings. Our children need care, not cuts."*

In addition, the bulk of children's programs are **discretionary** and not mandatory — meaning they must be funded each year and are not protected from cuts the way that seniors' programs like Social Security and Medicare are. Other children's programs, like the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which provides quality pediatric health coverage to kids whose working parents make too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to purchase healthcare on their own, require regular extensions by Congress. Unlike other federal health insurance for adults, CHIP has been **repeatedly** threatened.

Take Action Now!

This month, join First Focus on Children, policy experts and ambassadors in urging your Representative and both of your Senators to protect and expand critical children's programs rather than subjecting them to cruel and unnecessary cuts. Children need **#CareNotCuts**.

Steps for Writing an Effective Advocacy Email:

1. Reflect on why you care about the well-being of children.
2. Consider including information about yourself and that you are writing because Congress is making decisions that will impact our future generations.
3. Write a rough draft of your email that includes your support for child well-being and for the protection and expansion of programs that ensure the nutrition, education, health, and protection of all children. Pull from the text above for specific examples.
4. When you are happy with your email, explore the website of your member of Congress for where to send it. Find your [Representative](#) here and your [Senators](#) here.
5. Share any responses you receive with the team at First Focus on Children.
6. For bonus points, consider also using social media to convey the message above to your member of Congress using a positive and encouraging tone. Don't forget to use the hashtags **#CareNotCuts**, **#Commit2Kids**, **#InvestInKids** and **#VoteKids** and to tag **@Campaign4Kids** and your members of Congress ([you can find their social media accounts using our tool here](#)). [You may check out [the social media "how to" document for additional advice](#).]