



First Focus Campaign for Children

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Statement for the Record

California State Assembly Human Services Committee

Hearing on Measure AB 1520, Lifting Children and Families out of Poverty Act of 2017

April 25, 2017

Chairwoman Blanca E. Rubio, Vice Chairman Steven S. Choi, and Members of the Assembly Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony for the record.

First Focus Campaign for Children is a national, nonpartisan children's advocacy group dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal budget and policy decisions.

As an organization committed to reducing child poverty in the U.S., we fully support AB 1520, the Lifting Children and Families out of Poverty Act of 2017. Introduced by Assemblywoman Autumn R. Burke, it would commit the California State Legislature to cut California's child poverty rate in half within 20 years as well as provide a comprehensive framework of research-backed solutions to reach this. Investments in programs like early childhood education, childcare, home visiting, after school and summer school programs, job training, and increases to the California EITC and CalWORKS have all proven to significantly reduce child poverty.

Nationwide, nearly 1 in 5 children are living in families with incomes below the poverty line. Children disproportionately experience poverty in the U.S. and are 69 percent more likely to live in poverty than adults.<sup>i</sup> In California, despite being the 6<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, it has the highest rate of child poverty in the country.<sup>ii</sup>

Poverty is a particularly serious problem for children, who suffer negative effects for the rest of their lives after living in poverty for even a short time. Young children in poverty face multiple barriers and when this is compounded by a lack of access to opportunity and disinvestment in communities early in life, it sets a foundation for disparately poor outcomes throughout their lives.

Beyond the negative consequences of poverty for individual children are the costs that the entire nation pays when children grow up poor – from increased expenditures on criminal justice and healthcare to lost revenue and lower economic output when our nation's youngest citizens lack the support they need.

Child poverty targets have proven successful as a strategy for reducing child poverty because they provide a mechanism for advocates, media, and the public to hold the government accountable to take action and come up with a strategic plan to meet the target.

In 1999, the United Kingdom established a national child poverty target, which was supported by both the Conservative and Labour parties. Measured in U.S. terms, the UK's Child Poverty Target and resulting policy changes successfully cut the UK's absolute child poverty rate by 50 percent during the effort's first decade. The UK successfully raised incomes, promoted work, and improved child well-being while U.S. progress in these areas stagnated.<sup>iii</sup>

In the U.S., Connecticut<sup>iv</sup> and Vermont<sup>v</sup> both prioritized reducing child poverty through establishing state child poverty targets and the city of Cincinnati recently established a Child Poverty Collaborative<sup>vi</sup> with the goal of moving 10,000 children out of poverty within 5 years.

There has also been national legislation in the U.S. to introduce a child poverty target – last Congressional session, the Child Poverty Reduction Act of 2015 proposed establishing a national target to cut the child poverty rate in half within 10 years and eliminate it within 20 years.<sup>vii</sup> First Focus Campaign for Children and members of the Child Poverty Action Group<sup>viii</sup> are working with Congressional offices to get this legislation reintroduced this session.

Holding the California legislature accountable on this worthy goal will not only help to lift one million children out of poverty, it will also provide an over 2:1 return on investment. California can set a model for the nation through this landmark legislation and increase momentum for federal action to commit Congress to reduce child poverty.

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<sup>i</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Income and Poverty in the United States 2015," published September 13, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2016/demo/p60-256.html>.

<sup>ii</sup> GRACE, "End Child Poverty in California," [http://www.endchildpovertyca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/endchildpovertyca\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.endchildpovertyca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/endchildpovertyca_factsheet.pdf).

<sup>iii</sup> Branosky, Natalie and Mansour, Jane, *A Look Back at the UK Child Poverty Target: Transferable Themes for the U.S.*, First Focus, April 7, 2015, <https://firstfocus.org/resources/report/a-look-back-at-the-uk-child-poverty-target-transferable-themes-for-the-united-states/>.

<sup>iv</sup> State of Connecticut, Office of Policy and Management, "Child Poverty and Prevention Council," last visited April 24, 2017, [http://www.ct.gov/opm/cwp/view.asp?a=2997&Q=383356&opmNav\\_GID=1809](http://www.ct.gov/opm/cwp/view.asp?a=2997&Q=383356&opmNav_GID=1809).

<sup>v</sup> Vermont General Assembly, "Vermont Child Poverty Council," last visited April 24, 2017, <http://legislature.vermont.gov/committee/document/2018/45/Date>.

<sup>vi</sup> City of Cincinnati, "Child Poverty Collaborative," <http://www.childpovertycollaborative.org/>.

<sup>vii</sup> Baldari, Cara, "Child Poverty Reduction Act of 2015," First Focus Campaign for Children, May 19, 2015, <https://firstfocus.org/blog/the-child-poverty-reduction-act-of-2015/>.

<sup>viii</sup> "Child Poverty Action Group," last visited April 24, 2017, [www.childpovertyusa.org](http://www.childpovertyusa.org).