

October 22, 2021

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

For too long, children have not received the investments or the prioritization in policy decisions that they need and deserve. Before you now is the opportunity to change this trend and commit to creating a country in which every child has the ability to live a safe and healthy life in which they can reach their full potential.

We are writing to you today to explicitly call on you to commit to children by passing *all* child related items put forth in the reconciliation package. The child related provisions in the Build Back Better agenda cannot be seen as separate policies to choose from, but rather a collective policy and investment decision that when enacted together, will improve the lives of children today and for years to come.

History has shown us when tough negotiations are taking place, funding for children is extremely vulnerable to cuts. In 2009, the Senate recommended a \$100 billion reduction in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act — over 40% of which came from child funding.¹ Thankfully, champions for children in Congress did not let that happen and either partially or fully restored many of the original funding levels. We understand difficult decisions are going to be made as Congress works together to finalize the provisions in the Build Back Better Act. We're calling on you to be the reason Congress doesn't cut kids.

These policies are life-changing, and have enormous support from constituents across the country. In an [election-eve poll conducted by First Focus on Children and Lake Research Partners](#), voters from both political parties overwhelmingly supported actions across the board to address the needs of children. **On child health, 85 percent of respondents agreed that it was important to them that *every* child in the U.S. has health insurance coverage. In regards to child poverty, when specifically asked about expanding the Child Tax Credit and introducing full refundability, a wide margin (71-18%) of polled voters were in favor.**² For both of these measures, *large favorability was maintained* when looking at the splits by party affiliation and by presidential candidate preference.

This polling shows that American voters are united in their call for supporting children. This is policy that makes a positive difference in the lives of families and children; a difference that they can feel. With respect to child well-being, a recent report by UNICEF found that the U.S. ranked 36th out of 38 wealthy nations.³ We can and must do better by our children and our nation's future.

To highlight the necessity of these provisions, we have underscored the different child related programs and their respective impacts.

¹ First Focus on Children. February 2009. "Child Related Provisions in the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act. A Side by Side Comparison" <https://firstfocus.org/resources/legislative-comparison/side-side-comparison-child-related-provisions-american-recovery-reinvestment-act>

² First Focus on Children. November 2020. "Voters Have Spoken & They Support Children" <https://firstfocus.org/blog/voters-have-spoken-and-they-support-children>

³ UNICEF Innocenti, 'Worlds of Influence: Understanding what shapes child well-being in rich countries', Innocenti Report Card 16, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2020.

Child Tax Credit Expansion

There is overwhelming evidence that the investment and policy decisions made in the American Rescue Plan are significantly reducing child poverty, food insecurity and material hardship for families with children - already cutting child poverty nearly in half in 2021.⁴

One significant policy change is the strengthened and expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC), which increased the tax refund to as much as \$3,600 a year per child, authorized advanced monthly payments that began in July, and — very importantly — began including 26 million lowest-income families previously excluded by making the credit fully refundable.⁵ While we remain committed to the establishment of a permanently strengthened and expanded CTC, any extension must be paired with permanent full refundability to avoid causing great financial uncertainty for families with the greatest need. Other essential components include restoration of eligibility for children with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers; equal treatment of residents of the territories; monthly advance payments; coverage of 17-year-olds, and other structural policy changes recommended in the House Build Back Better Act.

The CTC improvements are responsible for much of the long overdue reduction in child poverty. A Columbia University brief estimates that the expansions to the CTC would lift 4 million children out of poverty and 1.6 million children out of deep poverty nationwide.⁶ Prior to the CTC changes in the ARP, 50% of Black/non-Hispanic and Hispanic children did not receive the full CTC, compared to 23% of White/non-Hispanic children;⁷ nearly 1-in-5 Black/non-Hispanic children did not receive any credit at all. By making the credit fully refundable to reach all households except the very highest earners and increasing the payment amounts, the expanded CTC in the American Rescue Plan will lift 52% of Black children, 61% of Native American children, and 45% of Hispanic children above poverty in 2021.⁸

The advanced monthly payments of the Child Tax Credit already are showing an impact on families across the country and are helping to reduce economic hardship and food insecurity. [In a conversation with First Focus on Children over the summer, working moms from West Virginia shared that the Child Tax Credit was providing important relief for their families.](#) The advance monthly payments were helping with essential household expenses, such as buying groceries, clothes for their children, back-to-school supplies, and other household expenses. A recent U.S. Census Bureau survey conducted just before and shortly after the first CTC payments were issued in July found that economic hardship declined in households with children and nearly half of all respondents to the survey of families who received the CTC payment — 47% — said they used the money to buy food.⁹

The full refundability aspect of the tax credit is essential to ensuring that the credit reaches the children that would most benefit from it. To attach work requirements to the expanded Child Tax Credit eligibility would

⁴ Parolin, Zachary, Sophie Collyer, Megan A. Curran, and Christopher Wimer. 2021. "Monthly Poverty Rates among Children after Expansion of the Child Tax Credit." Poverty and Social Policy Brief. Center on Poverty and Social Policy, Columbia University. Vol. 5, no. 4.

⁵ Treasury and IRS Announce Families of Nearly 60 Million Children Receive \$15 Billion in First Payments of Expanded and Newly Advanceable Child Tax Credit," U.S. Department of the Treasury, July 15, 2021. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0274>

⁶ Sophie Collyer, David Harris, and Christopher Wimer, "Earnings, Requirements, Benefits, Values and Child Poverty under the Child Tax Credit," Columbia University, Center on Poverty and Social Policy and Children's Research and Education Institute, Vol. 3 No. 3, March 5, 2019. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5743308460b5e922a25a6dc7/t/5c7fe48b1905f46e1214bc42/1551885452114/Poverty+%26+Social+Policy+Brief+3_3.pdf

⁷ Sophie Collyer, David Harris, and Christopher Wimer, "Left Behind: The One-Third of Children in Families Who Earn Too Little to Get the Full Child Tax Credit," Columbia University, Center on Poverty and Social Policy and Children's Research and Education Institute, Vol. 3 No. 6, May 13, 2019. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5743308460b5e922a25a6dc7/t/5cda0024be4e5b0001c6bdc7/1557790757313/Poverty+%26+Social+Policy+Brief+Who+Is+Left+Behind+in+the+Federal+CTC.pdf>

⁸ Parolin, Zachary, Sophie Collyer, Megan A. Curran, and Christopher Wimer. "The Potential Poverty Reduction Effect of the American Rescue Plan." Center on Poverty and Social Policy, Columbia University. 2021. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5743308460b5e922a25a6dc7/t/604aa2465cfc4a35b8a1c236/1615503943944/Poverty-Reduction-Analysis-American-Rescue-Plan-CPSP-2021.pdf>

⁹ Perez-Lopez, Daniel J., "Economic Hardship Declined in Households with Children as Child Tax Credit Payments Arrived," U.S. Census Bureau, August 11, 2021. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/economic-hardship-declined-in-households-with-children-as-child-tax-credit-payments-arrived.html>

drastically limit its impact. Many families, such as grandparents who care for grandchildren or parents with children with disabilities, would unjustly be disqualified from receiving the Child Tax Credit. Furthermore, Jain Family Institute reports that limiting the CTC refundability component would cut the dramatic child-poverty reduction estimates from a 40% decrease to only 8%.¹⁰ A recent report from Columbia University notes that the monthly child poverty rate fell from 15.8% in June to 11.9% in July 2021.¹¹ This drop was primarily due to the monthly advanced payment of the expanded CTC, resulting in 3.5 million fewer children experiencing poverty in August, 2021, with an outsized impact on reducing poverty for children of color.¹²

Tracking of the advanced monthly CTC payments offers new, strong evidence that improvements to the federal tax code can assist families struggling to afford basic living expenses, reduce child poverty, address income and racial inequities, and build families' financial security so all children have a strong start in life. Allowing the ARP's CTC expansion to expire would skyrocket child poverty, lead to greater economic insecurity and increase taxes on nearly 60 million families.

Child Care and Early Learning

The proposed funding for child care and early learning will allow states to create programs that best support children and families, and will provide the first opportunity for many underserved children to attend an early learning program. By investing in improving the quality and infrastructure of child care and early learning, increasing the affordability of such programs, and investing in the early learning workforce, a clear pathway is provided for many children to reach their full potential and demonstrate that the United States has a commitment to the development and well-being of young children and their families. These investments will help support and stabilize employers and our national economy as well.

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

CHIP is the only federal health coverage program that is subjected to repeated expirations that threaten the health of children. On several occasions, CHIP's authorization has expired before Congress took action. This essential health care program is too important to continuously be put at risk. CHIP has reduced the child uninsured rate by 68%, bringing the total uninsured rate of children down to under 5 percent in 2016. [Over 500 local and national organizations agree, the program must be permanently funded in order to ensure the health care of millions of children is not put once again in jeopardy.](#)

CHIP has a 24-year track record of success. During its last reauthorization in 2017, the program expired for more than 100 days. We should never gamble with the health of 10 million children again. CHIP should never again be used as a bargaining chip in political negotiations.

Several hundred organizations also support Congress including in the reconciliation bill a requirement of 12 months of continuous eligibility for children under Medicaid and CHIP. Continuous eligibility eliminates churn, bureaucratic paperwork and red tape, and gaps in coverage for children that can worsen health outcomes and lead to avoidable hospitalizations or emergency room visits. It provides needed stability for children and their families, while helping to keep children healthy.

¹⁰ Jack Landry and Stephen Nuñez. September 2021. "Reducing Refundability of the Child Tax Credit: Assessing Poverty Impacts and Trade-offs" Jain Family Institute. https://www.jainfamilyinstitute.org/assets/JFI_Microsimulation_Limited-CTC-Impacts.pdf

¹¹ Zachary Parolin, Sophie Collyer, Megan A. Curran, and Christopher Wimer, "Monthly Poverty Rates among Children after the Expansion of the Child Tax Credit," Columbia University, Center on Poverty and Social Policy and Children's Research and Education Institute, Vol. 5, No. 4, August 20, 2021.

<https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/monthly-poverty-july-2021>

¹² Zachary Parolin and Megan A. Curran, "Expanded Child Tax Credit Leads to Further Decline in Child Poverty in August 2021," Columbia University, Center on Poverty and Social Policy, and b. Bocconi University, Poverty and Social Policy Fact Sheet, September 24, 2021.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5743308460b5e922a25a6dc7/t/614de8355ffa375a4fc79c8f/1632495681679/Monthly-poverty-with-CTC-August-CPSP-2021.pdf>

Affordable Housing

Even before the pandemic, only one in four families eligible for rental assistance in the United States received it. Additionally, families with children make up 60 percent of households on the waiting list for housing assistance.¹³ All children should have a safe and affordable place to live and call home. We urge you to support children’s healthy development by increasing investments in Housing Choice Vouchers that prioritize families with children, especially those experiencing homelessness. Homelessness during a pandemic is particularly dangerous and harmful, as families and youth who are forced to stay with others cannot social distance, move frequently, and face barriers to remote learning and other services. Any investments in housing must be accompanied by wrap-around mobility services for families with young children and pregnant women. Mobility services will help families move to higher opportunity neighborhoods with high-performing schools, as well as access to quality child care, medical care, fresh food, and more. Further housing progress can be made for children by assistance in recruiting more landlords to accept Housing Choice Vouchers, as well as strengthening services such as pre- or post- move counseling, housing search assistance, security deposits, school enrollment, and connecting families with community-based supports.

Education

Proposed funding for education support and infrastructure investment would take a crucial step towards bringing our public education system closer to the standard that kids and teachers deserve. Infrastructure investments would counteract decades of chronic investment in school facilities and bring public schools into the 21st century. Broadband investment would make strides towards a world where no child lacks access to reliable high-speed broadband, in a time where the COVID-19 crisis has shown just how important that access is. Community school funding marks a vital step towards a world where schools which provide wrap-around services and holistic support to children and families is the norm, rather than an aberration. All of these are questions of equity. Black and brown children, along with indigenous children, as well as low-income, children experiencing homelessness, and children with disabilities are all overwhelmingly affected by the systemic shortcomings these funding increases target.

Immigration

We fully support efforts to create a pathway to citizenship that would benefit the nearly 1 million undocumented children, and more than five million children of immigrants. While disappointed by the parliamentarian’s decision to exclude a pathway in the reconciliation bill, we remain committed that this is the year in which immigrant youth, Temporary Protected Status holders, and essential workers receive a clear and equitable process to seek citizenship. We urge you to continue to pursue alternative proposals to include a pathway to citizenship in this historic legislative package and ensure that immigrant families are part of our nation’s successful recovery from the pandemic.

Nutrition

The \$35 billion in funding for childhood nutrition will expand the reach of free school meals to nearly 9 million children; create a permanent, nationwide program to extend Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer to more eligible low-income children; permit Medicaid direct certification to better link eligible children to free and reduced-price school meals; and increase access to healthier foods at school.

Despite significant progress on food insecurity, disparities continue. Nearly 11 percent of adults in households with children reported that the household did not get enough to eat compared to 7 percent for households without children, and while nearly 7 percent of white adults in households with children were food insecure, the number rises to 15.1 percent for Black and 12.7 percent for Latino communities.¹⁴ We urge you to maintain all of the child nutrition funding, as it will make a major difference in the lives of children.

¹³ Andrew Aurand *et al.*, “The Long Wait for a Home,” National Low Income Housing Coalition, Fall 2016, http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/HousingSpotlight_6-1_int.pdf.

¹⁴ Keith-Jennings, Brynne, Catlin Nehako, and Joseph Llobrera, “Number of Families Struggling to Afford Food Rose Steeply in Pandemic and Remains High, Especially Among Children and Households of Color,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, April 27, 2021. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/number-of-families-struggling-to-afford-food-rose-steeply-in-pandemic-and>

Paid Family and Medical Leave

The United States is the only Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country without a federal paid leave program, and this hurts workers, parents, and children every day. The lack of paid family and medical leave, presents workers and caregivers with the impossible choice of losing necessary income or staying home for important life events such as, caring for a family member, bonding with a child, and attending to a worker's own health issues. This forced choice leads to both economic and health consequences for children and families, as well as a loss of employees for businesses and stability for our economy. We urge you to bring the United States in line with paid leave policies around the world and protect workers, children, and families.

As negotiations continue over the reconciliation bill, we ask that you choose to be the champion kids need in Congress. After an incredibly difficult two years for children, we must not only work together to get back to pre-pandemic sense of normalcy, but strive to use the lessons we learned to create progress for children. We know what works for children, we have the tools laid out in front of us, now we need the political will to enact these transformative changes.

Your youngest constituents need you now, more than ever. Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

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

Bruce Lesley
President