

URGE CONGRESS NOT TO CUT EDUCATION FUNDING AS PART OF FINAL DEAL ON FISCAL YEAR 2024

Congress adjourned at the end of 2023 without having passed annual funding bills for 2024. In order to fend off a subsequent government shutdown, it then passed two so called "Continuing Resolutions" thereby keeping funding at last year's levels through early March. As it returns to deciding final funding levels for discretionary programs in 2024, it is critical that Congress preserve and expand funding for programs benefitting children.

A broad range of federal programs and services work together to support our nation's children, but additional investments are widely needed to meet their unique, urgent, and growing needs. Tragically, despite increased attention to children during the height of the pandemic, many reports have shown that matters are now getting worse—not better—for children as we choose not to sustain our commitment and federal investment in their wellbeing. While this is true in a number of areas, this month we will focus specifically on education.

Background:

Most education resources in the United States come from State and local sources. But the Federal government plays an important role as well by paying for a portion of our nation's education budget so as to ensure equal access and opportunity for all children.

In recent years, attacks on public education have proliferated. Sadly, our public schools, hardworking teachers and even students themselves have become the targets of culture wars that only serve to stoke fear, mistrust and division. We have seen book bans and political attacks leading to the resignation and early retirement of millions of talented professionals and the cynical, manufactured dynamic of pitting parents against educators. Meanwhile, our schools are struggling to get children back on track after **learning losses** and **rising mental health challenges** associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

To make matters worse, leaders in the House of Representatives have signaled that public education funding is on the chopping block. The annual **Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies funding bill** that was released last summer in the House of Representatives proposed a 28 percent cut from the year before—a funding level so low it had not been seen since 2008. Further, the bill included harsh cuts to essential K-12 and early education services for children.

The bill slashed the main federal funding stream (Title I) that supports schools with high percentages of low-income students by **nearly 80%**. If enacted, this funding reduction would be devastating for public schools across the country. Such cuts would eliminate **220,000 teachers** at a time when our schools are facing a teacher shortage and further hamper the effort to get kids back on track after COVID.

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Join Us in Taking Action!

This month we will be sending an email to our U.S. Representatives urging them NOT to cut education funding as part of a final deal on FY2024 appropriations.

1. Write a rough draft of your note that shares who you are and why you care about children.
2. Share your support for public education and the critical role of the Federal government in ensuring an equitable environment for all students, regardless of disability or familial income.
3. Mention your strong opposition to the **FY 2024 House Labor HHS Education bill** which seeks to cut essential programs for children and proposes severe reductions to Title I education funding that could remove 220,000 teachers from our children's school classrooms.
4. Educate and raise awareness with your Representative about the danger of such proposals to the wellbeing of children.
5. Specifically request that your member of Congress instead protect and expand resources for vulnerable children as a part of any final funding deal for FY2024.
6. When you are happy with your email, explore the website of your member of Congress for where to send it. Find your **Representative** here.
7. Share any responses you receive with the First Focus Team.
8. 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 #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.]