

# THE CHILDREN'S BUDGET COALITION

## INVESTING IN THEIR FUTURE

June 17, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC. 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chair  
House Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Ranking Member Collins, Chair Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As members and advocacy partners of the Children's Budget Coalition, we the undersigned groups are gravely concerned by the U.S. House of Representatives' approach to Fiscal Year 2025 (FY2025) funding because it fails to prioritize investments in children, their families, and those most in need as many urgent, day-to-day demands grow. Growing needs demand more investment, not less. Yet, the House committee-approved funding levels would lead to *at least* a 6 percent cut in non-defense discretionary (NDD) spending and reach more than 10 percent for some subcommittees with jurisdiction over many of the programs and services supporting children and their families. Such significant investment cuts would negatively impact our children's lives immediately, harm their healthy development, and increase hardship for millions of families at a time when needs are mounting. We strongly urge you to prioritize the health, safety, protection, and well-being of all our nation's children during the FY2025 appropriations process and the broader budget debates when Congress revisits the debt limit and negotiates reforms to the tax code.

A wide range of federal programs and services work together to support our nation's children, and additional investments are needed to ensure all children have the opportunity to thrive. [First Focus on Children's annual Children's Budget](#) tracks over 250 programs and illustrates that children historically have not received anywhere close to their fair share of government funds. Children make-up nearly 22% of our population, yet their share of federal spending was at an all-time low of 7.56% in FY2020 and reached its historic high of just 11.97% during the pandemic. Now, as the COVID-19 emergency has receded, so has our nation's commitment to children.

Preliminary analysis of the Babies Budget 2024 finds that the U.S. share of spending on infants and toddlers ages zero to three accounts for a mere 1.5% of the federal budget down from just 1.6% in FY2023. The broader 2023 Children's Budget showed a decrease of nearly 16% in real spending from

the previous fiscal year – this would have been worse without champion lawmakers fighting for critical investments in child care, health care, nutrition, and more. The FY2023 share of spending on children was 9.89%, falling well shy of the record 11.97% children’s share reached in FY2021 at the height of the public and economic health emergencies. This two-percentage point drop from historic investments in children means spending on our youngest is trending back to the same low levels seen prior to the pandemic, dismissing evidence that investing in children results in near and long-term positive outcomes for them and benefits their families and the country’s overall economy – [there is an estimated savings of \\$7 for every \\$1 dollar spent on reducing childhood poverty.](#)

We strongly encourage you to reverse that trend of disinvestment in our children. Specifically, we request that you:

- Center kids and their families as you make annual spending decisions and insist that critical programs supporting our nation’s children and their families receive at least a dollar-for-dollar increase, matching any increases in defense spending, and
- Work in a bicameral, bipartisan manner to ensure robust 302(b) allocations for subcommittees with primary jurisdiction over programs and services benefitting kids and families that includes resources from “*side deals*” negotiated last year, and
- Oppose any “poison pill” policy riders that harm children, such as a proposal on the FY2024 Agriculture spending bill that would have prevented FDA from issuing final rules to prohibit the sale of menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars, undercutting its ability to protect kids from tobacco products, and
- Protect mandatory programs that invest in children and families, including TANF, SNAP and Medicaid, and
- Reject future budget caps and approach tax reform in a manner that supports investments in our children, their families, and communities.

No child deserves to grow up in poverty or suffering avoidable trauma and hazardous exposures; rather every child should have safe and healthy environments to play, learn, live, and thrive. Certainly, poverty, hunger, homelessness, child health services and education needs, the mental and environmental health crises, and other issues faced by children were rising pre-pandemic concerns, but today are at epidemic proportions and are emergencies in and of themselves. There must be a better understanding of the serious challenges children experience affecting all aspects of their lives. Examples are many and alarming:

- [Child and teen mortality increased by 20% between 2019 and 2021, the largest increase in 50 years.](#) These alarming figures come after a previous study found U.S. children had a 70% greater chance of dying in childhood than kids born in other wealthy countries. Tragically, in 2021, suicide was the second most common cause of death among children aged 10-14. Firearms deaths ranked first.
- The U.S. infant mortality rate in 2022, which already was much higher than in other wealthy nations, [increased for the first time in two decades.](#) Mortality rates increased significantly for American Indian and Alaska Native children.

- [10% of all U.S. children \(7.3 million kids\) did not have enough food to keep them healthy in 2022.](#) That is a nearly 7% increase of children over the previous year. Rates of food insecurity were significantly higher for households with children that included a Black or Hispanic adult.
- Millions of children are losing health care. [Nearly 5 million children have lost access to Medicaid through the unwinding process.](#) In some states, such as Texas, nearly two-thirds of the children enrolled in Medicaid lost coverage.
- [Child poverty more than doubled in 2022 compared to 2021, with the rate of children living in poverty increasing from 5.2% to 12.4%.](#) This increase represents more than 5 million children that we allowed to backslide into poverty within a single year. Black, Hispanic, and American Indian and Alaska Native children experience poverty at a rate over twice that of white children.
- We are in the midst of a mental health crisis, [with close to 20% of children aged 3-17 experiencing a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorder.](#)
- A [2023 analysis](#) found that more than 300,000 teaching positions were left vacant or filled by teachers not fully certified for their assignments, representing about 1 in 10 of all teaching positions nationally. Shortages inequitably impact students of color and students from families experiencing low incomes.
- While pandemic relief funds are set to expire soon, student achievement gaps that worsened during the pandemic [continue to persist.](#) Students in high-poverty school districts lost more ground than students in higher-income ones during the pandemic. The gaps that were already there in 2019 widened during the pandemic and those widened gaps have not closed.
- [According to national data, just over 65% of schools have access to a full-time school nurse \(greater than 35 hours per week\) and only 56% of rural schools employ a full-time school nurse, and over 25% of schools do not have a school nurse at all.](#) Every student deserves access to a full-time school nurse.
- [More than 1 million school-age children were identified as homeless the 2020-2021 school year,](#) and 5% of all children under 6 were experiencing homelessness even before the start of the pandemic. Homelessness is even more prevalent among children of color. [Federal funding is not sufficient to assist all families with children who struggle to afford housing and families with children are a declining share of recipients of rental assistance.](#)
- [Recent studies have shown that children are at the greatest risk of eviction. Children are more than 40% of the individuals that face eviction yearly.](#)
- [An estimated 50% of public schools have outdated heating and ventilation systems,](#) and thousands of schools likely contain PCBs and asbestos, among other risks posed by poorly managed chemicals and pesticides used in and near school buildings. Couple this with [CDC research estimating that 40% of school-age children have one or more existing chronic health issues,](#) including asthma, which remains the leading cause of school absenteeism.
- Quality child care is out of reach for many families: [The cost to a family of child care for two children in a center in 2022 was more than annual mortgage payments in 41 states and the District of Columbia,](#) and the cost of child care for an infant at a center was more than in-state tuition at a public university in 32 states and D.C. Nearly [60% of Hispanic families live in child care deserts,](#) where access to child care is limited.
- [Global vaccination rates for children have fallen to 2008 levels,](#) with long-forgotten diseases including measles and polio surging in the United States for the first time in decades.

Important budget decisions are before you in the coming months and during the rest of this Congress that will have consequential effects on the investments we make for children, families, and those most in

need. Millions of children in the United States and around the world are suffering and deserve our commitment to creating better outcomes for their now and future. Children offer an inherently unifying issue. Polling consistently shows that Americans — regardless of party, gender, race, or other demographics — want a positive children’s agenda.

We are grateful to the champions and defenders for children in Congress who continue to push forward on behalf of kids, but more is needed. In fact, the United States lags behind many of its peer nations in the supports we provide children and families. Any country that invests more and provides stronger support for child nutrition, economic mobility, child health care, paid family leave, and other child services will raise a next generation that will out compete us. Child-centered policy is good for our country and is good for our kids. We urge you to choose to prioritize children, their families, and those most in need during ongoing budget debates.

Sincerely,

First Focus Campaign for Children

Adelante Mujeres

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Federation of Teachers (AFT), AFL-CIO

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

American Psychological Association

Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

Boys and Girls Clubs of American

CA Child Care R&R Network

Caring Across Generations

Children’s Advocacy Institute

Children’s Museum of Minot

Child Welfare League of America

Clackamas Workforce Partnership

Coalition for Community Schools

Coalition for Human Needs

Committee for Children

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherds, U.S. Provinces

Congress of Communities

Family Centered Treatment Foundation

Family Focused Treatment Association

First 5 Alameda County

First 5 LA

First 5 Monterey County

Future Generations Collaborative  
Groundwork Ohio  
Healthy Schools Network  
Institute for Educational Leadership  
Kids Included Together  
Koinonia Family Services  
Lincoln Children's Museum  
Main Street Alliance  
MomsRising  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement  
National Association of Counsel for Children  
National Center for Families Learning  
National Center for Healthy Housing  
National Child Care Association  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Diaper Bank Network  
National Education Association (NEA)  
National Network for Youth  
National School Nurses Association  
National Women's Law Center  
Organization Concerned About Rural Education  
Pennsylvania Child Care Association (PACCA)  
Poverty Project at Institute for Policy Studies  
Prevent Blindness  
Providence Children's Museum  
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)  
RESULTS  
Save the Children  
SchoolHouse Connection  
The FLIP Museum  
Walden Family Services  
Westchester Children's Museum  
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights  
Youth Villages  
ZERO TO THREE

CC: Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer  
Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell  
House Speaker Mike Johnson

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries  
House and Senate Budget Committees  
Senate Finance Committee  
House Ways and Means Committee