

THE CHILDREN'S BUDGET COALITION

INVESTING IN THEIR FUTURE

April 20, 2026

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC. 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC. 20515

Dear Majority Leader Thune, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leader Jeffries:

As members of the Children's Budget Coalition — a network dedicated to ensuring children are a priority in federal budget decisions — and advocacy partners, we urge you to prioritize bold investments in children and families in upcoming budget and appropriations decisions. Specifically, we **urge Congress to reverse the disinvestment in children and families and safeguard Congress's constitutional "power of the purse."** Families across the nation face rising costs for food, housing, child care, energy consumption, education, and health care, yet federal investment in children continues to fall behind.

Stop the Decline: Invest in Kids

For the fourth consecutive year, the share of federal spending dedicated to children has declined. [In fiscal year 2025](#), just 8.57 percent of federal spending was directed toward children—amounting to only \$8.57 out of every \$100 spent. Even more concerning, investment in the earliest years of life remains strikingly low, [with only 1.59 percent of federal resources going to babies and toddlers and the cuts to Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) under H.R. 1 disproportionately impact babies](#) because these programs account for more than 47% of all the federal support they receive. Adding to this alarming trend, the President's Fiscal Year 2027 budget request seeks a \$73 billion cut to non-defense discretionary programs while calling for a \$1.5 trillion defense budget that represents more than a 40% increase.

These trends are deeply concerning and call for immediate action to reverse them. That goal is in jeopardy as Congress again turns to the filibuster-proof reconciliation process. This approach could lead to deeper cuts to programs that support children and families — including Medicaid and SNAP — under the assertion that such reductions are needed to address federal deficits or finance other priorities. But cutting support for children will not solve the nation's fiscal challenges. Reducing these investments may generate limited short-term savings on paper, but those savings come at significant cost — harming children's health, nutrition, and stability today while creating larger economic and social costs over time for families, communities, and the nation. Instead of cutting basic needs programs and undermining the tax credits that help families raise children, Congress should act to reverse the harms of last year's reconciliation package and safeguard children's access to health care, nutrition, education, and other essential supports.

[It is extremely clear that we need to invest more - not less - in children and their families.](#) Child poverty negatively impacts every aspect of the lives of children, and [the American people overwhelmingly support policies that reduce poverty and improve the lives of children.](#) [There is tremendous evidence showing that investing in children consistently leads to stronger outcomes both now and in the future,](#) improving their health, supporting their success in school, and increasing their earning potential over time. These positive effects strengthen families and communities and bolster our long-term economic competitiveness. Reversing the disinvestment in our nation's children must be a shared priority.

Fortunately, Congress largely rejected the deep non-defense spending cuts proposed in the President's FY 2026 budget, but funding levels for key domestic programs remain insufficient to meet national needs. [After adjusting for inflation, non-defense funding in 2026 is actually lower than in 2025 and continues a long-term decline,](#) leaving investments in areas such as education, child care, housing assistance, public health, and research constrained despite growing demand.

Safeguard Congress's Constitutional "Power of the Purse."

At the same time, Congress faced a second major challenge: ensuring that appropriated funds are implemented as Congress intended. In response to concerns that the Administration has withheld funding, reduced staffing, or reshaped programs without congressional approval, lawmakers included targeted guardrails in appropriations bills to protect congressional authority. Unfortunately, these protections are limited.

Congress's authority over federal spending is essential to protecting programs and services that give children a fair start. We strongly encourage you to reaffirm this core constitutional responsibility and ensure that appropriated funds are distributed fully, promptly, and transparently. Acting on both priorities — reversing disinvestment and protecting Congress's power — is critical to building a stronger, healthier, and more equitable future for all children.

Congress Must Protect and Strengthen Core Supports for Children

As Congress establishes budget guardrails and funding levels, we urge lawmakers to advance a bipartisan children's agenda that:

- Protects and strengthens Medicaid, SNAP, and other foundational supports that protect children's health, nutrition, and safety;
- Expands access to affordable, high-quality child care and early learning opportunities;
- Supports public education and services that help children succeed academically and developmentally;
- Prevents child and family homelessness through stable housing investments;
- Promotes children's well-being, family stability, and equitable access to services for historically marginalized communities, including rural, low-income and immigrant families; and
- Rejects budget caps and approaches tax reform in a manner that supports investments in our children, their families, and communities.

[Past policy choices demonstrate that progress is possible.](#) When Congress made comprehensive investments in children during the pandemic — including improvements to the Child Tax Credit and expanded family supports — child poverty fell to historic lows and families experienced measurable economic stability. Allowing these policies to expire reversed much of that progress.

Center Children and Families in Budget Decisions

States are grappling to absorb the enormous, historic cuts to Medicaid and SNAP from H.R. 1, which are only beginning to take effect now. Our nation's children and their families cannot afford another round of cuts to the programs they rely on to get the care they need or put food on the table.

Budget decisions made today will determine children's lifelong opportunities as well as the nation's future prosperity. Fiscal debates should not begin with what can be cut, but with what must be protected to secure children's health, safety and well-being and therefore our nation's long-term economic strength. A budget that reduces support for children while expecting them to sustain the future economy is neither balanced nor forward-looking.

We urge Congress to adopt budget and appropriations policies that place children at the center of national priorities and ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy, safe, and prepared to contribute to our shared future.

Sincerely,

First Focus Campaign for Children

Access Care Anywhere

AP-OD

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Child Care Aware of America

Child Care Resource Center, California

Child Welfare League of America

Coalition on Human Needs

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S Region

Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children

Faith in Action National Network

Family Centered Treatment Foundation

FFTA

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Futures Without Violence

Illinois Collaboration on Youth

Indivisble Rolando Park

Institute for Policy Studies' Poverty Project

Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes

Kids Can't Wait

Kinnect

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Association of Counsel for Children

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Association of Social Workers

National Center for Healthy Housing

National Center on Adoption and Permanency

National Diaper Bank Network

National Organization of State Associations for Children

National Women's Law Center Action Fund

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Prevent Blindness

Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)

RESULTS

Save the Children

School-Based Health Alliance

The New York Foundling

Utahns Against Hunger

Youth Law Center

Youth Villages