

# THE CHILDREN'S BUDGET COALITION

## INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

February 4, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
United States House of Representatives  
235 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
United States House of Representatives  
2468 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We, the undersigned members of the Children's Budget Coalition, are writing to urge you as congressional leaders to prioritize children and families in this fiscal year's appropriations process. The Children's Budget Coalition is comprised of over 80 child and family advocacy organizations who are dedicated to ensuring that children and families receive the federal funding that they need to thrive.

Unfortunately, spending on children has not kept pace with growing need in recent years. The share of federal spending on children declined to an all-time low of just 7.21 percent in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, which represents a 10 percent decline since FY 2015.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, issues like child poverty remain a persistent problem. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau recently confirmed that child poverty remains high, with a rate of 16.2 percent, and children continue to experience poverty at rates far higher than adults. As child advocates, we know that meaningful and comprehensive investments in the many discretionary programs that serve our communities and families help lift children out of poverty, achieve household financial stability, and improve our nation's economic health. That being said, it is now more important than ever to secure crucial investments in children during the federal appropriations process in the form of adequate top-line caps that do not shortchange non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs, robust 302(b) allocations for bills serving the majority of children's programs, and timely passage of bills to avoid harmful disruptions in funding.

Last year's Bipartisan Budget Act (H.R.3877) brought welcome spending increases over the next two fiscal years; however, the agreement mostly front-loaded these increases into FY 2020. The deal caps discretionary spending increases for FY 2021 at .8 percent, or \$5 billion, which is a far cry from FY2020's increase of about 4 percent. This leaves children's programs competing for sparse funding increases with other important funding priorities, such as vital services for veterans. For example, leaving the VA Mission Act under the caps would cause all other NDD spending to fall by about 1 percent in FY 2021. Congress should consider a special cap exemption that provides a sustainable

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<sup>1</sup> "Key Takeaways from Children's Budget 2019," *First Focus on Children*. 10 September 2019. <https://firstfocus.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Key-Takeaways-from-Childrens-Budget-2019.pdf>. Accessed 22 January 2020.

source of funding for critical programs supporting our nation’s children and struggling families as well as our veterans during FY 2021 funding negotiations. An investment in the health and well-being of the next generation is an investment in our nation’s future, and we must ensure that budget shortfalls do not hamper these priorities.

We also ask that Congress emphasize healthy 302(b) allocations for appropriations bills that house the most programs serving children and families. Specifically, the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education (Labor-H), Agriculture-Food and Drug Administration (Ag-FDA), Commerce-Justice-Science (CJS), and Transportation-Housing and Urban Development (T-HUD) appropriations bills together accounted for 98.82 percent of NDD spending on children in FY2019. To reverse the unfortunate trends in spending on children, Congress must provide these bills with adequate funding to meet the growing needs of our nation’s youth.

Furthermore, the importance of passing appropriations bills on time is especially significant for programs serving children. While much of spending on adults is mandatory, spending on children is disproportionately discretionary.<sup>2</sup> This reality makes funding for programs serving children and families subject to yearly review and renewal through the appropriations process, thus disproportionately exposing them to the risk of government shutdowns and continuing resolutions (CR’s). The historic government shutdown experienced in early FY2019 seriously harmed the economic security, health, and well-being of low-income children and families who participate in vital government programs. Similarly, the recent pattern of using stopgap measures to fund the government has created unpredictable and inadequate program funding that fails to keep pace with inflation and inhibits agencies from planning ahead to address the pressing needs of our children and families. We hope that Congress halts this recent trend in FY2021 by returning to regular order and coming together to fund the government in a timely manner.

Although stopgap measures were necessary for FY2020, we were pleased to see a final outcome that was bipartisan and provided key investments in children. We hope Congress can build on this work during this fiscal year, and the Children’s Budget Coalition stands ready to work with you on making critical investments in our nation’s children and future.

Signed,

1,000 Days  
Afterschool Alliance  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
Campaign for Youth Justice  
Child Care Aware of America  
Child Welfare League of America  
Children's Advocacy Institute

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<sup>2</sup> “Budgeting for the Next Generation: Does the Budget Process Prioritize Children?” *Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget*. 16 August 2018. [http://www.crfb.org/sites/default/files/Does\\_The\\_Budget\\_Process\\_Prioritize\\_Children.pdf](http://www.crfb.org/sites/default/files/Does_The_Budget_Process_Prioritize_Children.pdf). Accessed 22 January 2020.

Children's Aid  
Children's Health Fund  
Children's Hospital Association  
City Year Inc.  
Coalition for Human Needs  
Communities in Schools  
Family Focused Treatment Association  
First Focus Campaign for Children  
Jumpstart  
Mental Health America  
National Association for Family, School and Community  
Engagement  
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools  
National Center for Healthy Housing  
National Child Care Association  
National Diaper Bank Network  
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reforms  
National Network for Youth  
National Respite Coalition  
National WIC Association  
Nurse-Family Partnership  
Prevent Blindness  
Public Advocacy for Kids  
Save the Children Action Network  
SchoolHouse Connection  
Share Our Strength  
United Way Worldwide  
YMCA of the USA  
Youth Villages

CC: The Honorable Nita Lowey  
The Honorable Kay Granger  
The Honorable Richard Shelby  
The Honorable Patrick Leahy