

THE CHILDREN'S BUDGET COALITION

INVESTING IN THEIR FUTURE

December 7, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
U.S. House of Representatives
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
U.S. House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

As members of the Children's Budget Coalition, comprising over 80 advocacy organizations dedicated to prioritizing children and families in federal policy and budget decisions, we are writing to urge you to pass a robust, comprehensive emergency relief package this month to address the escalating needs of our nation's children and families. COVID-19 has disrupted every aspect of children's lives. As we continue to learn about the devastating effects of the coronavirus outbreak and its economic turmoil, a grim outlook for our children's future emerges which calls for immediate federal assistance to support and protect their health and well-being throughout this crisis.

The coronavirus infection rates are spiking across the country -- exceeding 14 million cases -- and while children are not being infected at similar rates, their health and well-being are in no way immune. [A November report from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children's Hospital Association](#) finds the number of COVID-19 cases exceeds 1 million among children. At the same time, the number of uninsured children is at its highest level in two decades. This includes children in correctional facilities, of whom more than 2300 have tested positive, and numbers continue to climb among both youth and staff according to [the Sentencing Project](#). In addition, [recent data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#) indicates that COVID-19 has led to a drastic decline in essential child health services such as screenings for developmental delays in physical, cognitive, or sensory (such as vision) health; childhood vaccinations and immunizations; and routine primary and preventive care. Forgoing essential child health care can lead to long-term health consequences, particularly for children with special health care needs and those who live in poverty.

As infection rates surge, the economic recovery slows and disproportionately harms lower income families, especially families of color. Households of color with children are being hit the hardest by unemployment, as well as experiencing higher rates of infection and fatality from COVID-19 as parents are over-represented as essential workers and often lack access to paid sick leave. [The Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University's analysis](#) shows that poverty rates are increasing, with 2.5 million more children experiencing poverty since May. [Researchers at Columbia University also report](#) that "the share of children with an unemployed parent has climbed to historic highs, reaching 14.3% in July, greater than the peak during the Great Recession." The real unemployment rate remains alarmingly high with many more workers underemployed and seeing reduced paychecks, at the same time as approximately 12 million individuals expect unemployment benefits to disappear at the end of the month.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey, roughly 30 million adults in households with children expect a loss of employment income in the next few weeks. Over 13 million adults in households with children are experiencing food insufficiency. Of adults in households with children, 18% of adults from communities of color are experiencing food insufficiency compared to 10% of white adults. As the halt on evictions approaches its December deadline, 28% of adults in households with children are behind on rent compared to 23% one month ago.

As families with children endure more pandemic-associated economic instability, a [recent survey by Washington University in St Louis](#) found that “24% of families with children reported losing a job or income due to a lack of suitable child care.” These effects are “concentrated in Hispanic households, poor households, self-employed households, and households with very young children.” In addition, the public health crisis is compromising schooling resulting in tens of millions of children learning remotely. According to an [October report by the National Education Association](#), 25% of all school-aged students live in households without broadband access or web-enabled devices to facilitate remote learning. A [Common Sense Media report](#) concluded that 35% of Native American students, 30% of Black students, and 26% of Latino students had inadequate Internet access at home compared to 18% of white students. We need Congressional action to not only provide immediate support, but also to address structural changes in the widening racial disparities and learning gap exacerbated by this pandemic.

The bipartisan Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided much-needed emergency assistance and temporary help for families weathering the economic downturn. However, key benefits expired this summer, remaining jobless benefits run out this month, and many families are still waiting to access assistance. Many others are ineligible for benefits. A [FosterClub national poll](#) found that “nearly 65 percent of transition-age youth from foster care who were working before the pandemic lost employment and half of those who applied for unemployment benefits did not receive assistance.” Even though the House passed two versions of the Heroes Act this summer, months have passed, compromise still eludes lawmakers, and children continue to suffer as families agonize over how to pay their monthly bills.

As a large coalition, we strongly concur that Congress needs to pass a robust, comprehensive emergency relief package as soon as possible. A piecemeal approach would fail to address the scope and duration of this public health crisis and its economic fallout. In the coming days and weeks, we urge you to provide those who need it most with immediate and direct cash assistance and additional relief in critical areas of health care, housing and food assistance, child welfare, education support, afterschool and summer programs, child care, and more in order to protect the health of all children and struggling families across the country. Our children are depending on your leadership to come together as you did in March and pass a COVID-19 relief package that aggressively tackles this pandemic and puts our economy on a path to recovery that includes *all* our nation’s families and children.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Afterschool Alliance
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
American Federation of Teachers
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Boys and Girls Clubs of America

Campaign for Youth Justice
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Aid
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Health Fund
City Year Inc.
Communities In Schools National Office
Early Care and Education Consortium
Every Child Matters
Families USA
First Focus on Children
Futures Without Violence
Jumpstart
Mental Health America
MENTOR
National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement
National Association of Counsel for Children
National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators (NAESPA)
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of School Nurses
National Center for Healthy Housing
National Children's Campaign
National Diaper Bank Network
National Network for Youth
National Respite Coalition
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
National WIC Association
Nurse-Family Partnership
Partnership for America's Children
Prevent Blindness
Prevent Child Abuse America
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Save the Children Action Network
School-Based Health Alliance
SchoolHouse Connection
Share Our Strength
The Family Focused Treatment Association
United Way Worldwide
YMCA of the USA
Zero to Three