

February 24, 2025

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
U.S. House

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House

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

As Congress considers the significant pressures on and potential changes to health and human services programs this year, the undersigned 384 national, state, tribal, and local organizations look forward to partnering with you to enhance and preserve key programs intended to strengthen families, to prevent children and youth from entering the child welfare system and to help older youth bridge the tenuous transition from the foster care system.

These programs support a significant population of children and families. Each year, millions of families come into contact with the child welfare system. Many more do not because they receive mentoring and support from extended family and faith-based and community resources as well as critical services that are supported by the federal government,— such as substance use and mental health treatment, access to basic needs, and community-based, family-centered services. Nearly 600,000 children spend time in foster care each year, with nearly 370,000 children in foster care on a given day. More than 18,000 youth age out of foster care each year, with 50,000 children adopted from foster care, and more than 100,000 awaiting adoption.¹ Over 2.4 million children are living with kinship caregivers, such as a grandparent or other relative.²

We are grateful for Congress' demonstrated commitment to and sustained bipartisan policymaking and investment in children and families. We share your commitment to improved outcomes for children and their families by maximizing the use of public resources to: support families at the earliest signal of need before a crisis occurs, keep children at home with their families whenever possible to avoid unnecessary foster care and a traumatizing and costly government intervention, prioritize kinship care, and promote youth remaining in or close to home in family like settings as they receive supports. The following critical federal programs support a family-focused array of services that keep children and parents together and prevent unnecessary government disruption of families and system involvement.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. "The AFCARS Report," (2024). Available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcars-report-30.pdf>

² See <https://www.gu.org/explore-our-topics/grandfamilies/>

Medicaid

Medicaid covers 41 percent of all births and nearly half of all children.³ For children and families in or at risk of entering the child welfare system, Medicaid plays an even more central role. Nearly all children in foster care have coverage through Medicaid, which is important because up to 80 percent of children entering foster care have significant mental health needs, and one-third have a chronic health condition. Medicaid's comprehensive coverage is critical for addressing those needs, particularly with the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit.

Medicaid also addresses the ongoing opioid epidemic's role driving foster care placements. As many as two-thirds of children who enter foster care have a parent with a substance use disorder. By complementing other federal programs, including services supported by the bipartisan *Family First Prevention Services Act* (P.L. 115-123), Medicaid helps parents access treatment that can keep families safely together as envisioned by Congress through the SUPPORT Act and Family First.^{4,5}

Medicaid is also essential for supporting kinship and adoptive families. Approximately a third of children in foster care are in kinship care⁶ with a relative or other adult with whom they have a meaningful relationship. These caregivers often have limited financial means, and Medicaid ensures families can access needed health services for their children who have experienced significant trauma. Additionally, children with special needs adopted from foster care receive Medicaid.^{7,8} Adoptive families rely on this comprehensive access to keep their families stable and healthy.

Social Services Block Grant

The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) represents 10 percent of annual federal child welfare spending, providing \$1.7 billion annually for a wide array of upstream, community-based supports and services aimed at helping children and families thrive and preventing future child welfare system involvement.⁹ It does this by providing flexible dollars to states to promote economic self-sufficiency, prevent and address child abuse and exploitation, and prevent and reduce unnecessary institutionalization.

SSBG funds access to childcare, supports for youth in foster care, services to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect, family-centered substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, family resource

³ KFF- <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/10-things-to-know-about-medicaid/#:~:text=Medicaid%20covers%2041%25%20of%20all,43%25>

⁴ <https://preventionservices.acf.hhs.gov/>

⁵ <https://www.medicaid.gov/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/cib100520.pdf>

⁶ AFCARS, 2024

⁷ U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. "Implementation Guide: Medicaid State Plan Eligibility, Eligibility Groups- Mandatory Coverage, Children with Title IV-E Adoption Assistance, Foster Care, or Guardianship Care. Available at <https://www.medicaid.gov/resources-for-states/downloads/macpro-ig-children-with-title-ive-adoption-assistance-foster-care-guardianship-care.pdf>

⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. "Child Welfare Policy Manual," See 8.2B.11 available at

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/public_html/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp.jsp?citID=49

⁹ https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ChildWelfareFinancingReport_ChildTrends_May2023.pdf

centers, and many supports for relative caregivers raising children through kinship care. In the most recent year for which data are available, SSBG served 7 million individuals, including 2 million children.¹⁰

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program represents 19 percent of federal child welfare spending.¹¹ Cuts to the TANF program would significantly affect state and tribal child welfare budgets and have a negative impact on children in kinship care and foster care. TANF is also a critical program for preventing both child abuse and neglect and unnecessary child welfare system involvement.

Congress' enactment of the *Protecting America's Children by Strengthening Families Act* (P.L. 118-258) in December included a bipartisan emphasis on ensuring poverty, in and of itself, is not reported or responded to as neglect, and expanding access to non-recurrent short-term economic assistance to stabilize families in crisis. TANF is a critical source of that type of support, and is vital to ensuring financial shocks do not become the kind of crisis that can lead a family into unnecessary child welfare system involvement and foster care. When families have greater access to the resources in TANF, there is less child abuse and neglect and foster care. Not only is this what's best for families, it also is a less expensive way to intervene.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) served 42 million individuals in 2024.¹² Approximately half of SNAP beneficiaries are children.¹³ Recent changes to SNAP benefits have offered a natural experiment in which to see the impact of reduced SNAP benefits; when enhanced SNAP benefits became optional in 2021, the 17 states that opted out had higher rates of households with SNAP benefits consistently reporting they "sometimes" or "often" did not have enough food to eat relative to states that retained enhanced benefits.¹⁴

Recognizing the value of SNAP, in 2023 Congress took bipartisan action to ensure access to SNAP for youth aging out of foster care, which can be a vital lifeline for that transition. Like TANF, SNAP provides families with critical support for promoting economic stability and success. This stability reduces the likelihood of maltreatment and unnecessary foster care.

As Congress considers any potential changes to funding or policy for these and other important programs serving children and families, we urge you to engage directly with children, youth and families with lived experience so they can underscore what worked for them and the important role federal

¹⁰ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/fact-sheet/ssbg-fact-sheet>

¹¹ https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ChildWelfareFinancingReport_ChildTrends_May2023.pdf

¹² <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/snap-annualsummary-1.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/key-statistics-and-research>

¹⁴ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/04/impact-of-the-end-of-extra-snap-benefits.html>

policies and investments plays in supporting safe and stable families, minimizing unnecessary governmental intrusion into families, and preventing unnecessary foster care or out-of-home placements.

Thank you for your continued bipartisan collaboration in service of children and families. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to Zach Laris at zach@bolderhorizon.org.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Access Ready, Inc.
Action for Child Protection
AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Civil Liberties Union
American Psychological Association Services
American Public Health Association
American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC)
Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Association of Children's Residential & Community Services (ACRC)
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Bolder Horizon
Boys Town
CarePortal
Center for the Study of Social Policy
Child First
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Advocacy Institute
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Rights
Children's Trust Fund Alliance
Civil Rights Corps
Clarvida
Co-Executive Editor, GrandFamilies online Journal
Coalition on Human Needs
CommunicationFIRST
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Congressional Research Institute for Social Work Policy
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)
Families Rising
Family Centered Treatment Foundation
Family Equality

Family Focused Treatment Association
First Focus Campaign for Children
Foster Care Alumni of America
Foster Focus Magazine
Foster Love
FosterClub
Futures Without Violence
Generations United
Healthy Families America
Healthy Teen Network
iFoster
Justice and Joy National Collaborative (formerly National Crittenton)
Juvenile Law Center
Kidsave
Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association of Counsel for Children
National Association of County Human Services Administrators
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers
National Center on Adoption and Permanency
National Diaper Bank Network
National Disability Rights Network
National Family Preservation Network
National Family Resource Center Coalition
National Family Support Network
National Head Start Association
National Health Law Program
National Indian Child Welfare Association
National League for Nursing
National Safe Place Network
National Youth Advocate Program, Inc.
North American Family Institute
Nurse-Family Partnership
Omni Family Institute
Parents as Teachers
Parents as Teachers National Center
Parents as Teachers WV region 5
Prevent Child Abuse America
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
SchoolHouse Connection
Specialized Alternatives for Families and Youth of America, Inc.
TASH
The Advocacy Institute
The Bair Foundation - Kindred Roots
The Institute for Human Services
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health/Got Transition
The Omni Family of Services

The Ray E. Helfer Society
Think of Us
Union for Reform Judaism
University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work
Voice for Adoption
Women of Reform Judaism
Youth Law Center
Youth Villages
Zero to Three
11:11 Media Impact

State and Local Organizations

Alabama

Alabama Chapter-American Academy of Pediatrics
Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers
Children's Aid Society of AL
Healthy Families Tuscaloosa
VOICES for Alabama's Children

Alaska

Alaska Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Alaska Children's Trust

Arizona

Arizona Council of Human Service Providers
Children's Action Alliance
Prevent Child Abuse Arizona

Arkansas

Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Child Welfare Scholar and Advocate

California

AAP-Orange County Chapter
American Academy of Pediatrics, CA Chapter 3
Boys Republic
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California Family Life Center
California Family Resource Association
Child Abuse Prevention Center
Child & Family Center
County of San Diego HHSA
County Welfare Directors Association of California

Families Uniting Families
John Burton Advocates for Youth
Koinonia Family Services
Latino Family Insitute
Maryvale
Prevent Child Abuse California
Prevention Partnership International
Redwood Community Services
Sacramento County
Safe & Sound
SAY San Diego
School of Social Work at California State University Long Beach
St. Anne's Family Services
Stanford Sierra Youth & Families
Walden Family Services
Wayfinder Family Services
Seneca Family of Agencies

Colorado

American Academy of Pediatrics, Colorado Chapter
Beautiful Redemption
Clayton Early Learning

Connecticut

Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families
Mothers Of Victim's Equality Inc.
NAFI Connecticut, Inc

Delaware

Children & Families First DE
Delaware Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Prevent Child Abuse Delaware

District of Columbia

American Academy of Pediatrics, DC Chapter
DC Children's Trust Fund
Plaza West Grandfamilies
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSSNCA)

Florida

Florida Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics, Inc.

Georgia

American Academy of Pediatrics - Georgia Chapter

Together Georgia
Voices for Georgia's Children
Wellroot Family Services

Hawaii

Hawaii Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Hawaii Children's Action Network

Idaho

Idaho Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Prevent Child Abuse Idaho

Illinois

Ascend Justice
Aunt Martha's Healthy Families of America
Garden of Prayer Youth Center
Illinois Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics
Kids Above All
One Hope United
Prevent Child Abuse Illinois
Rincon Family Services
Shelter, Inc
UCAN

Indiana

Adoptions of Indiana
First Things First Porter County
Foster Success
Healthy Families
Indiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Iris Family Support Center
Paddock View Residential Center, Inc.

Iowa

Iowa Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Iowa Family Resource Collaborative
Lutheran Services in Iowa
YPN

Kansas

Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center
Kansas Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics
Keystone Learning Services
Saint Francis Ministries

Kentucky

Children's Alliance of Kentucky
Kentucky Chapter of the AAP
Kentucky United Methodist Children's Homes
Key Assets Kentucky, Inc.
Maryhurst
Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky
Second Mile Behavioral Health
Sunrise Children's Services

Louisiana

Bayou Lotus
Clover New Orleans
Kennedy's Child Care Academy
Louisiana Family Resource Centers Network
Speaking 2 Inspire thru Experience

Maine

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc. & The Kinship Program
American Academy of Pediatrics, Maine Chapter
Maine Children's Alliance
Maine Children's Trust

Maryland

Bowman Therapeutics
Fathers Fighting 4 Fathers Community Mentorship
Healthy Families Dorchester
Maryland Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP)
Paths for Families
Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts at the University of Baltimore, School of Law
The Children's Home
The Choice Program at UMBC
The Karabelle Pizzigati Initiative in Advocacy for Children, Youth and Families at the University of Maryland

Massachusetts

Ascentria Care Alliance
Boston University
Bridges Homeward
Children's League of Massachusetts
Friends of Children, Inc.
HopeWell
Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
NFI Massachusetts, Inc.

Michigan

Christ Child House
Konnected with Care (KWC)
Lapeer County Health Department
MCHS Family of Services
Michigan Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health
Michigan League for Public Policy
Michigan Office of the Child Advocate
Parenting Communities
St. Clair County Health Department
Tynes Co

Minnesota

LifeCare Public Health
Minnesota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Mississippi

Be Better Now Mentorship and Development

Missouri

Children's Trust Fund
Missouri Coalition for Children

Montana

Missoula Public Health
Montana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Watson Children's Shelter
Zero to Five Montana

Nebraska

Nebraska Appleseed
Nebraska Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Voices for Children in Nebraska

Nevada

Bamboo Sunrise, LLC
Children's Advocacy Alliance (Nevada)
Foster Kinship
Nevada Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Tru Vista Foundation

New Hampshire

NFI North
NHAAP
Waypoint

New Jersey

Acenda Integrated Health
Advocates for Children of New Jersey
Care Plus NJ
Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of New Jersey, Inc.
New Jersey Alliance for Children, Youth and Families
New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Parents as Teachers

New Mexico

New Mexico Pediatric Society
Pegasus Legal Services for Children

New York

Children's Aid
City Living NY
Dominican Women's Development Center
Elmcrest Children's Center
Graham Windham
Healthy Families Jefferson/Lewis/St. Lawrence Counties
JCCA
Lawyers For Children
New York State Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health
NYS AAP - Chapter 2
NYS AAP - Chapter 3
Parent Advisory Council Early Childhood Alliance
The Children's Village
The New York Foundling

North Carolina

Benchmarks
Children's Home Society of NC
Family Service of the Piedmont
NC Child
NC Pediatric Society
Positive Childhood Alliance North Carolina (previously, Prevent Child Abuse NC)
Rapid Resource for FAMILIES

North Dakota

North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association

Ohio

Adams County Children Services
Athens County Children Services
Allen County Children Services
Ashtabula County Children Services Board
Brown County Job and Family Services
Champaign County Department of Job and Family Services
Clinton County Job and Family Services
Delaware County Family and Children First Council
Delaware County Job & Family Services
Directions for Youth & Families
Fairfield County Job & Family Services - Protective Services
Fayette County Dept. Job and Family Services
Geauga County Job and Family Services
Harrison County (Ohio) Department of Job and Family Services
Healthy Moms and Babies
Highland County Job and Family Services
Logan County Children's Services
Lorain County Children Services
Lucas County Children Services Board
Mahoning County Children Services
Morgan County Job and Family Services
Morrow County Job and Family Services
Muskingum County Adult and Child Protective Services
Ohio Chapter, AAP
Public Children Services Association of Ohio
Sandusky County Dept of Job and Family Services
Scioto County Dept. of Job & Family Services
Shelby County Dept of Job and Family Services
Trumbull County Children Services
Tuscarawas County Job and Family Services
Wyandot County Children's Services

Oklahoma

OK Turning Point Council - Policy
Oklahoma Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

Oregon

Oregon Pediatric Society
Prevent Child Abuse Oregon

Pennsylvania

Child Welfare Education & Research Programs
PA Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
PA Council of Children, Youth & Family Services
Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers State Office
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
The Center for Children's Justice (C4CJ)
Voices for Children Coalition

Rhode Island

Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

South Carolina

Able SC
Children's Trust of South Carolina
Fostering Great Ideas
HALOS (South Carolina)
South Carolina Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

South Dakota

South Dakota Chapter of The American Academy of Pediatrics

Tennessee

Tennessee Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Texas

Texans Care for Children
Texas Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
Texas Pediatric Society
TexProtects

Utah

4 The Youth Inc.
Children's Service Society of Utah
Prevent Child Abuse Utah
Voices for Utah Children

Vermont

KidSafe Collaborative
NFI Vermont, Inc.
Prevent Child Abuse Vermont
Vermont Foodbank

Vermont Kin as Parents
Voices for Vermont's Children

Virginia

Amelia Department of Social Services
Brunswick County Dept. of Social Services
Charlottesville Department of Social Services
Charles City County Department of Social Services
Children's Home Society of Virginia
City of Petersburg Department of Social Services
Department of Healthy Families
Families Forward Virginia
Franklin City Department of Social Services Advisory Board
Gloucester County Department of Social Services
Lancaster County Children's Services Act (CSA) Program
Northumberland Department of Social Services
Roanoke County Dept. of Social Services
VA Organizing
Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Virginia League of Social Services Executives

Washington

AKin
Partners for Our Children
Seneca Family of Agencies
Treehouse
WA Assoc for Children and Families
Washington Family Support Network

West Virginia

Healthy Families Mountain State
TEAM for West Virginia Children
West Virginia Child Care Association

Wisconsin

Bay View Community Center
Burnett County Family Resource Center, Inc.
Child Care Resource and Referral
Children's Wisconsin
Family Connections, Inc.
Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Waaswaaganing Nindoodem
Healthy Families Burnett County
Lac Courte Oreilles Tribal Mino Maajisewin HV Program
LIFE Wellness and Counseling Services
Thriving Wisconsin

United Way of Sheboygan County
Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (WIAAP)

Wyoming

Wyoming Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics