

February 2, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kamala D. Harris
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20510

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris:

As negotiations continue on the Build Back Better Act, I am writing to uplift the needs of children. Every aspect of the lives of children has been negatively impacted by the global pandemic, and even before this crisis kids were faring poorly. Therefore, on behalf of children, I urge you to **protect kids in the Build Back Better package negotiations, and emphasize that this bill is for our children, as was the focus in your original American Families Plan proposal. *Build Back Better is a children's bill— and needs to remain so.***

Additionally, we encourage you to consider reverting to the original *American Families Plan* title or another such name that better communicates the core benefits of this package to children and families. The child provisions in this package take much-needed strides to address structural racism and promote equitable outcomes for all our nation's children. From the inception of this framework, children have been a focus of the policy priorities and investments set forth by your Administration.

We know that the Biden-Harris Administration understands the hardships impacting children and the deepened disparities that were brought on by the pandemic. Your commitment to alleviate this suffering stands out in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and other actions taken by the Administration during your first year in office. The framework put forth by the White House in the American Families Plan resulted in a [robust Build Back Better bill passed by the House of Representatives](#). We thank you for demonstrating strong and inspiring leadership for kids at a very important time, and ask that you continue this commitment to children in your leadership with Build Back Better until a final bill prioritizing children is passed by both chambers.

The American Rescue Plan Act not only helped children and families through a time of grave uncertainty and hardship but also illustrated that these policies deliver compelling near and long-term positive results for kids.

For example, the advance payments of the Child Tax Credit have provided much needed relief for many children and families, with 91% of families with low incomes spending the CTC payments on basic living or education expenses.¹ The CTC is one of the greatest tools at our disposal to cut child poverty. Without the improvements made under ARP Act, millions of children that were kept out of poverty over the last six months are at risk of falling back into poverty, potentially increasing the national poverty rate from 12.1

¹ Claire Zippel, "9 in 10 Families With Low Incomes Are Using Child Tax Credits to Pay for Necessities, Education" (Washington: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021), <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/9-in-10-families-with-low-incomes-are-using-child-tax-credits-to-pay-for-necessities-education>

percent to at least 17.1 percent.² Cash transfer programs similar to the CTC also have been shown to lead to positive health and developmental impacts. A recent study on infant brain activity showed that predictable, monthly cash transfers to low-income families presented more high-frequency brain wave activity that has been linked to higher cognitive skills.³

To abandon the effective and significant policies proposed in Build Back Better, after they have shown overwhelming success, would be devastating to children and families. While exacerbated by the pandemic, these issues were not brought into existence by COVID-19, and they will not leave once the virus is eradicated. Build Back Better will address immediate needs while also providing the long awaited and critical investments children require to have a strong, healthy, and safe start to life.

Our country's children cannot afford to be left behind as Build Back Better moves forward. The history of child-related provisions being vulnerable to tradeoffs during negotiations raises additional concern for our community.⁴ Children need you to be their champion and ensure that they remain a high priority in Build Back Better.

On behalf of children, we call for the following provisions to remain in the Build Back Better Act:

- Affordable child care and early learning
- Free universal pre-school for all 3 and 4 year olds
- Permanent full-refundability and a 1-year extension on the improved Child Tax Credit
- Permanent extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program, and 1-year continuous eligibility for children
- An increased value and lower age eligibility threshold for the Earned Income Tax Credit, which strengthens support for former foster youth and youth experiencing homelessness
- Extended Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer and expanded free school meals
- Immigration relief for children and caregivers
- 4-weeks of paid family and medical leave
- 12 months of postpartum coverage through Medicaid

The benefits that the child-related provisions in Build Back Better can offer children are undeniable. We support many efforts put forth by the White House and Congressional champions to finalize and pass this legislation, and while we recognize the complexity of ongoing negotiations for this historical children's bill, the state of children calls for urgent action.

The [impact of the omicron variant](#) and [expiration of advance Child Tax Credit payments](#) are leaving many families and children across the country feeling defeated and unheard. A quick response is needed, and the White House can lead through executive action while the push for the agenda laid out in Build Back Better continues.

² Zachary Parolin, Sophie Collyer, Megan A. Curran, "Sixth Child Tax Credit Payment Kept 3.7 Million Children Out of Poverty in December" (New York: Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy, 2022), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5743308460b5e922a25a6dc7/t/61ea068f13dbfa56bfc9be17/1642727056209/Monthly-poverty-December-2021-CPSP.pdf>.

³ Sonya V. Troller-Renfree et al., Initial Results of Baby's First Years Study, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (January 24, 2022), <https://www.pnas.org/content/119/5/e2115649119>.

⁴ First Focus on Children, "Child Related Provisions in the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act: A Side By Side Comparison" (2009) <https://firstfocus.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ARRA-SBS.pdf>

Here are 10 executive actions that can be taken to better the lives of children:

- 1. Create the infrastructure needed to better prioritize and coordinate children’s programs in the federal government:** Federal policy involving children needs better coordination and alignment. Programs that impact the lives and well-being of children cut across an array of federal departments, but children do not live in such silos. [Over 350 groups have urged the creation of a Children’s Cabinet and White House Office of Children](#) to help with better coordination and to ensure that the best interests of children are being considered at the highest levels of government. Additionally, a [coordinating council housed in the Department of Health and Human Services](#) would allow Administration and policy staff across agencies to work together to offer the best solutions and delivery of services to children.
- 2. Establish a Cross Agency Priority at the Office of Management and Budget:** A Cross Agency Priority on child well-being has been recommended by the Government Accountability Office twice.⁵ Such a Cross Agency Priority should establish a Children’s Budget to review both domestic and international spending priorities and create a framework for improving rules to coordinate and improve child well-being for our nation’s children, as directed by the Modernizing Regulatory Reform memorandum signed on your first day in office.
- 3. Set a National Child Poverty Reduction Target:** Child poverty reduction targets have been implemented and successful in many countries, such as the United Kingdom and Canada. Recently targets are gaining attention, with [70% of American voters supporting a national target](#) in the United States, and New York state⁶ and Puerto Rico⁷ recently establishing their own initiatives. A national target should be established through executive order to cut child poverty in half within a decade. The Child Tax Credit in 2021 took us a long way toward reaching that goal but progress has been sidetracked by conversations having nothing to do with the well-being of children. A Child Poverty Reduction Target would help put the attention back on its rightful place – the lives and well-being of children.
- 4. Establish a White House Conference on Child Poverty:** A White House conference would provide an opportunity to analyze the science, barriers to action, and facts related to cutting child poverty in this nation—including evidence of the costs poverty imposes on society, the range of negative impacts poverty has on children in their now and their future, and evidence of the impact the improved Child Tax Credit has had on children and families in 2021. A White House Conference would help make the case and set the standard for appropriate consideration of the science and data in relation to poverty reduction policies. A dedication to child poverty reduction would also lead to improvements in just about every other aspect of the lives of children.
- 5. Adopt a Best Interest of the Child Standard:** Committing to applying a “best interest of the child” standard across all executive branch policy would prioritize attention to the protection and safety of children in federal initiatives. [More than 80% of all voters, regardless of party, support such a standard.](#)
- 6. Require Child Impact Statements:** [Child Impact Statements](#) are already used in countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Sweden, and in certain U.S. cities and counties to evaluate proposed

⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Child Well-Being: Key Considerations for Policymakers,” (November 2017) <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-18-41sp.pdf>

U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Key Considerations For Implementing Cross-Agency Priority Goals and Progress Addressing GAO Recommendations,” (September 2021) <https://www.gao.gov/assets/720/716998.pdf>

⁶ Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, “Child Poverty Reduction Act Signed into Law, Boldly Commits NYS to Fighting Poverty” (December 2021) <https://scaany.org/child-poverty-reduction-act-signed-into-law-boldly-commits-nys-to-cutting-child-poverty-in-half/>

⁷ Instituto Del Desarrollo De La Juventud, “Puerto Rico ya cuenta con una ley para reducir la pobreza infantil a la mitad en 10 años” (2022) <https://www.juventudpr.org/blog/puerto-rico-ya-cuenta-con-una-ley-para-reducir-la-pobreza-infantil-a-la-mitad-en-10-anos>

laws, regulations, and policies to determine potential impacts on children. Children are not little adults. Child Impact Statements would ensure that our policies take into account the unique or special issues of importance to children, just as the Environmental Protection Agency does in regulating certain pesticides and chemicals.

7. **Take Better Care of Children Experiencing Homelessness:** The definition of homelessness remains one of the biggest barriers to addressing child and youth homelessness. The Department of Housing and Urban Development defines homelessness so narrowly that [millions of children remain in hotels, doubled up with friends or relatives, or living in other dangerous situations because they do not qualify for assistance.](#) These same children are identified as homeless by the Department of Education and other agencies. An alignment of definitions used across the Administration would help protect children.
8. **Create a Plan to Protect Children from COVID-19:** The pandemic has resulted in many direct and secondary impacts on children. While critical steps, such as providing vaccinations for children, have been taken, we ask that the Administration create a plan to further strengthen protections for children and look at addressing pandemic induced problems. Such a plan could include efforts to increase child vaccination rates, an analysis of the potential resources needed for children who develop long COVID health issues, increased mental health services, supports for children who lost caregivers as a result of COVID-19, and more.
9. **Build on Environmental Health Steps taken by the Biden-Harris Administration:** Reentering the Paris Climate Accord, including climate provisions in Build Back Better, and replacing lead pipes across the country are all important steps taken by the Administration to better the health of children. Building on this progress, the Environmental Protection Agency has the immediate authority to improve regulations on various pollutants and toxins, such as asbestos and perchlorate. These toxins are proven to inhibit brain development, aggravate asthma and cause cancer among children.
10. **Use the State of the Union Address to Uplift the Needs of Children:** The past two years have been especially difficult for children. The upcoming State of the Union address is the perfect opportunity to draw attention to the difficulties children are experiencing, share the benefits of the child provisions in Build Back Better, and announce a Children's Agenda full of actions your Administration will take to address the many and complex issues facing kids.

The provisions listed in Build Back Better and the executive actions shown here are not just a list of policy options, but rather are a collective that when enacted together, can truly make transformative, long-lasting, positive and popular change for children. As child advocates, many times we hear lawmakers talk about prioritizing children, but unfortunately action is limited. We urge you to continue to be steadfast in your leadership on children's issues and build on the progress your Administration has achieved in order to provide pathways that will create immediate change and a bright and fair future for all of the country's children beyond your tenure.

As you have written, *“These are the promises we must make to our children. These are not someone else's children, they are our children. America's children. [...] if we do not protect the health and dreams of all of our children, we are betraying our own best interests.”*

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



For a full list of recommended priorities for the Administration, please find: [The Promises We Must Make to Our Children: Recommendation to the Biden-Harris Transition Team](#)

For a fact sheet of child-related provisions in H.R.5376, please see: [Build Back Better for Children](#)