



children's defense fund

Leave No Child Behind®

March 20, 2020

Dear Member of Congress,

As you work quickly with your Congressional colleagues to pass new legislation to address the devastating public health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, the Children's Defense Fund urges you to include in the next package a number of critical provisions to protect our nation's children and families. Our children are too often the unwitting victims of our national policy choices—we simply cannot allow that to be the case in the federal response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act took an important step forward for children and families, but more action is needed to make sure our most vulnerable children and their families can survive this crisis. Certain particularly at-risk populations— including poor children, children in the foster care system, homeless children and children in mixed immigration status families—must be accounted for in the policy response to the COVID-19 crisis.

We strongly urge you to insist upon the inclusion of the following in the next coronavirus relief package:

- Direct cash assistance for adults and children targeted specifically at those in households with low incomes or no income at all. This assistance should phase out for those at higher income levels, be available regardless of immigration status, and continue for the duration of this crisis.
- A nationwide, 15 percent increase in the minimum SNAP allotment, to ensure increased access to nutritious foods for every SNAP household; increasing the minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30; and suspending all SNAP administrative rules that would terminate or weaken benefits.
- Immediate support for the country's vulnerable renters and homeowners through a national moratorium on eviction and foreclosure and robust emergency assistance for those who fall behind on housing payments as a result of this crisis. Any package must also include additional money for Public Housing Agencies and significant funding for rapid rehousing programs and services for individuals facing homelessness.
- Expand child welfare funding to help states meet the needs of the child welfare system—including increasing funding for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood to \$500 million to meet the needs of older youth in care, providing \$20 million to kinship navigator programs to meet the needs of grandparents and other older adults caring for children, and supporting the child welfare workforce to continue doing their work safely by fully funding the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act—while ensuring that keeping children safely with families remains a priority through a billion dollar investment in the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program.
- Significantly increase funding for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), which can help states provide critical services and supports tailored to the needs of their community. These funds can fill in some of the gaps not covered above and backfill a number of human services given the

flexibility of SSBG. This also needs to include a set-aside for Tribes, which does not currently exist.

- Additional federal financial support for state Medicaid programs, including an additional increase in the federal matching rates to states and other efforts to support the health care workforce during this crisis.
- Mandatory 12-month continuous eligibility in Medicaid and CHIP to ensure no child or parent loses health coverage in the midst of a public health crisis due to bureaucratic red-tape. Additional efforts to reduce and eliminate administrative barriers for states and families should also be taken to ensure families can get enrolled and stay enrolled.
- Flexible emergency funding for child care and Head Start programs including direct assistance to programs based on enrollment and payments to programs and workers in the case of closures, the need for substitute educators, and continued care for children whose families are no longer able to afford the services.
- Education Preparedness and Support Grants to governors to support K-12 schools and higher education institutions through closures – including continued meal programs – and provide emergency financial aid for college students in need of food, housing, and healthcare following abrupt school closures.
- Expanded comprehensive emergency paid sick days and paid family and medical leave bill—fully funded by the federal government during this emergency—to provide additional support to workers and businesses during the coronavirus outbreak and future public health emergencies.
- Relief and access to services for all families — regardless of immigration status.

We urge Congress to make these provisions a priority in the next relief package and to keep the unique needs of vulnerable children and their families' top of mind during the continued efforts in this difficult time for our country.

If we can expand on any of these recommendations or provide more information about the needs of children and families during this crisis, please do not hesitate to contact CDF's Interim Policy Director, Kathleen King (kking@childrensdefense.org). Thank you for your leadership during this crisis.

Sincerely,



Max Lesko
National Executive Director