



**children's
defense fund**
unleashing the joy in growing up

January 28, 2025

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Chair
Senate Committee on Finance
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Finance
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, MD
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Crapo, Ranking Member Wyden, Chair Cassidy, and Ranking Member Sanders:

As you re-open the work of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee for the 119th Congress, we write to thank you for accepting oversight responsibility for agencies vital to the well-being of American children and families. Last week, in celebration of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., people of faith across the country re-committed to building the Beloved Community: a place of health, hope, and wholeness where all children are well. With our own sense of call to the work of healing in mind, **we write to express our strong opposition to the confirmation of Mr. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., as Secretary for the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).**

We believe healthy, laughing, nourished, dancing, growing, learning, and thriving children are the sign of a strong nation. In Beloved Community, all young people enjoy regular, nourishing meals and active lives, marked by positive social adjustment, sustainable environments, and health care homes for their bodies and minds. We are called to reflect God's healing character by creating the conditions for young people to thrive. In fulfilling this call, we advocate for leaders steadfastly committed to advancing public health. This is especially important for HHS and the role to which Mr. Kennedy Jr. aspires.

The Department [is charged](#) "to enhance the health and well-being of all Americans, by providing for effective health and human services and by fostering sound, sustained advances in the sciences underlying medicine, public health, and social services." The Secretary will guide (among other agencies) the Administration for Children and Families, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). In this role, Mr. Kennedy Jr. would have unique responsibility for the 37.6 million children enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance (CHIP) and Medicaid programs.

Unfortunately, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s public record militates against the very mission of the Department and places children in jeopardy. The Secretary of Health and Human Services must be guided by a commitment to public health, sound science, and policies that promote wholeness for individuals, families, and communities. Yet, we share the concerns of several members of the HELP Committee and your colleagues in the Senate regarding Mr. Kennedy Jr.'s history of promoting policies based on fringe science and rejection of scientific evidence which has real-world consequences.

In basic guidance to parents and caregivers in our communities, we encourage them to take children (with access) to the doctor for regular check-ups and vaccines, to the dentist for good oral health, and to be consistent with their instruction to ensure young people understand their responsibilities for their own care. The nominee's personal and organizational contributions to anti-vaccine theories have been so vast that a 2023 Indiana University study of public COVID-19 communications pointed to him as "the top superspreader" of health misinformation, accounting for 13 percent of misleading retweets on social media platforms. Mr. Kennedy Jr. complicates basic parenting, science, and health by suggesting an early Administration push to remove fluoride from drinking water, advancing conspiracy theories subverting its documented value to oral and cardiovascular health.

Furthermore, his recent waffling on other health positions related to the country's most critical concerns, raise questions about his intellectual curiosity and principled commitment to assessment of matters for which the Secretary of Health and Human Services must provide steady direction for a nation of 335 million people, especially its more than 73 million children and youth. As the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the nation's leading health philanthropy, has noted, Mr. Kennedy Jr.'s reckless public rhetoric on health issues has undermined trust in public health and endangered lives. As his actions have already harmed tens of thousands, we shudder to imagine the consequences of his leadership for the Department.

Our nation deserves a Secretary for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services who is guided by evidence, demonstrates wisdom, and models commitment to protecting all Americans. This is a matter of public safety, trust, and care where leaders from both sides of aisle agree. Furthermore, there are far more qualified candidates for this critical role.

We urge you to act in the interest of America's health and her children by ending Mr. Kennedy Jr.'s consideration in the HELP Committee, preserving time with your colleagues in the Senate for discussion of a more committed and qualified nominee. In this unique time, let us heed the call to health and healing, by agreeing to live our highest values and care for children and youth. We stand ready to speak with you further regarding our concerns on this matter.

For our children,

The Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson, Children's Defense Fund (Washington, DC)

Bishop Allyson Abrams, Empowerment Liberation Cathedral (Bowie, MD)

Kevin Agee, Washington-Virginia District, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (Washington, DC)

Karen Anderson, AME Church (Las Vegas, NV)

Cleante Apollon, Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ (Washington, DC)

Deborah Arthur (Wilsonville, OR)

Javian Baker, Georgetown University (Waggaman, LA)

Monica Bartley (Brooklyn, NY)

Rev. Jessica Bass, New Creation Christian Fellowship (Windcrest, TX)

Lexi Baysinger, Faith for Justice (O'Fallon, IL)

Toni Belin Ingram, Presiding Elder, AME Church (Atlanta, GA)
Rev. Traci Blackmon, HopeBuilds, LLC (Florissant, MO)
Reginald Blount, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (Buffalo Grove, IL)
Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie, Conference of National Black Churches (Dumfries, VA)
Carolyn Boswell, Retired Teacher (Norris, TN)
Benjamin Ledell Bragg-Reynolds, Peoples Congregational United Church of Christ (Washington, DC)
Rev. Valerie Bridgeman, WomanPreach! (Delaware, OH)
Barbara Brooks, Southern Rural Black Women Initiative (Leland, MS)
Rev. Tiffany Brooks, Children's Defense Fund (Bowie, MD)
Azana Bruce, CDF Black Student Leadership Network (Memphis, TN)
Wendy Bruner, Peace United Church of Christ (Saint Louis, MO)
Susan Buckson, Allen Temple AME Church (Atlanta, GA)
Cora Burnside, Southern Rural Black Women Initiative (Arcola, MS)
Curry Butler, Jr., AME Church (Augusta, GA)
Elizabeth Caldwell, Westminster Presbyterian Church (Nashville, TN)
Kenny Camphor, Covenant Baptist UCC (Washington, DC)
Debra Camphor, Covenant Baptist UCC (Washington, DC)
Janet Canada (Oak Hill, WV)
Janet Chance, Educator and Community Member (Philadelphia, PA)
Laura Cook (Quincy, IL)
Clara Copeland, First Baptist Church (Springfield, OH)
Trenda Cotton-Shipp, New Creation Christian Fellowship (San Antonio, TX)
Patricia Crone, Retired (Morgan Hill, CA)
Patricia Crumley, Morning Glory Montessori (Minneapolis, MN)
Susan Daffron, United Women in Faith (Maryville, TN)
Ben Dawson, Children's Defense Fund (Washington, DC)
Kay Eady, Southern Rural Black Women Initiative (Albany, GA)
Nyle Fort, Columbia University (New York, NY)
Ronald Greene, Christian Church – Disciples of Christ (Davenport, WA)
Deborah Gregg, Peace United Church of Christ (Saint Louis, MO)
Lisa Griffin, United Church of Christ (Pittsburgh, PA)
Renee Griffin, Delta Heritage Development (Marianna, AR)
Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale, Ray of Hope Christian Church (Decatur, GA)
Joy Hamlat (Oxnard, CA)
Olivia Harris, Children's Defense Fund (Greenville, MS)
Anne Hawthorne, Los Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation (Los Angeles, CA)
Ash-Lee Henderson, Utopian Visions LLC (Chattanooga, TN)
Rebekka M. Henry, Spelman College (Atlanta, GA)
Michelle Higgins, Faith for Justice (St. Louis, MO)
Elizabeth Hughes (Piedmont, CA)
Eileen Hurley, Spiritus Christi Mental Health Center (Rochester, NY)
Catherine Inserra, Kids Above All (Chicago, IL)
Jill Iovino, The Perfecting Church Sewell, NJ)
Clarence Jackson, St. Luke (Braselton, GA)
Holly Jackson, United Church of Christ (Montgomery Village, MD)
Jewelean Jackson, JJP/Vegan By Nature (Minneapolis, MN)
Ella Johnson, New Creation Christian Fellowship (Windcrest, TX)
Johnnie Johnson, New Creation Christian Fellowship (Schertz, TX)
Gail Joiner, Women with a Vision (Cincinnati, OH)

Andre Jones, AME Church (Wrens, GA)
Rev. Cece Jones-Davis, Speckled Bird (Fairfax, VA)
Gabrielle Kennedy, AME Church (St. Louis, MO)
Carmen Lampe Zeitler (Des Moines, IA)
Karen Lewis, St. Paul's (Lansing, MI)
Sister Beverly Anne LoGrasso, Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland (Pepper Pike, OH)
Wayne Marks, Covenant Baptist UCC (Washington, DC)
Vincent McMillon, St. Paul MBC (Saginaw, MI)
Diana Mejia, Alcanza Mas (Duarte, CA)
Makiyah Moody, Kairos & Heary (Nashua, NH)
Mary Nickson (Allen, TX)
Oswaldo Nuesch, Retired Minister (Cary, NC)
Virginia Okoloko (Fenton, MO)
Su Yon Pak, United Theological Seminary (New York, NY)
Dr. Lorena Parrish, Wesley Theological Seminary (Fort Washington, MD)
Terrie Patterson, AME Church (Athens, GA)
Gale Peterson, United Church of Christ (Kirkland, WA)
Brenda Phoenix, New Creation Christian Fellowship (Cibolo, TX)
Erin Pickersgill, Episcopal Diocese of Missouri (St. Louis, MO)
Rev. Dustin Pickett, Children's Defense Fund (Washington, DC)
Nancy Powalski, Retired Head Start and Early Childhood Teacher (South Bend, IN)
Kathleen Putnam, Community Church of Chapel Hill Unitarian Universalist (Chapel Hill, NC)
Joni Resides, Peace UCC (St. Louis, MO)
Barbara Richter (Kirkwood, MO)
Jimmy Roberts (Thomson, GA)
Daphne Robinson, Daphne Robinson Training and Consulting (Shreveport, LA)
Margaret Rowe, Peace UCC (Webster Groves, MO)
Pat Schutz, Sparta UMC (Charlotte, NC)
Rev. Dr. Robert Scott, St. Paul Baptist Church (Jackson, MS)
Gloria Shields, Children's Defense Fund–Southern Regional Office (Jackson, MS)
Rev. Marvin Silver, Children's Defense Fund (Washington, DC)
RA Simmonds, New Creation Christian Fellowship (Windcrest, TX)
Carol Singletary, Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® (Columbia, SC)
Joan Skorupski, Retired (Basking Ridge, NJ)
Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc. (Chicago, IL)
Joseph A. C. Smith, JACSM, Inc. (Natchez, MS)
Chadwick Smith, Grace UMC (Atlanta, GA)
Gregory Stewart, New Creation Christian Fellowship (San Antonio, TX)
Yvonne Stinson, Simpson-Gillespie UMC (Charlotte, NC)
Beverly Swann, New Creation Christian Fellowship (San Antonio, TX)
Rev. Adam Russell Taylor, Sojourners (Silver Spring, MD)
Sister Ellen Themes, Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland (Pepper Pike, OH)
Janet Thomas (Sequim, WA)
Sister SheilaMarie Tobbe, Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland (Pepper Pike, OH)
Zoe Towler, Think Together (Lakewood, CA)
Brenda Turnage, Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools (Pensacola, FL)
Ekemini Uwan, Truth's Table LLC (Silver Spring, MD)
Charlene Walker, Faith in New Jersey/Audacity to Change (Roselle, NJ)
Wanda Walker, Impact Living Ministry (Minneapolis, MN)

Eddie Walker III, Augusta North Conference (Atlanta, GA)
Dr. Rosalva Washington, New Creation Christian Fellowship (San Antonio, TX)
Naomi Washington-Leapheart, Salt Yeast Light LLC (Philadelphia, PA)
Melinda Weekes-Laidlow, Beautiful Ventures (Atlanta, GA)
Kathy Wilson, Covenant Baptist UCC (Clinton, MD)
Charles Wilson, Covenant Baptist UCC (Clinton, MD)
Pastor Susan Winger, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Rockwood, PA)
Preston Winkler, Jerusalem Baptist Church (Ridge Spring, SC)
Sharon Wood-Dunn, Union Presbyterian Seminary (Richmond, VA)
William Young, Covenant Baptist UCC (Washington, DC)
Christina Young, Children's Defense Fund (Bronx, NY)
Leigh Ann Yuen, Garden Gate Child Development Center (Vineyard Haven, MA)

C: Members of the U.S. Senate Committees on Finance and Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP)