



May 23, 2018

The Honorable Kevin Brady
Chair, House Ways & Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Neal
Ranking Member, House Ways & Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adrian Smith
Chair, Human Resources Subcommittee
House Ways & Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Danny Davis
Ranking Member, Human Resources Subcommittee
House Ways & Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Brady, Ranking Member Neal, Subcommittee Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Davis:

As members of the U.S. Child Poverty Action Group, a partnership of child-focused organizations dedicated to reducing child poverty in the U.S., we are writing to urging you to strengthen the ability of the Joining Opportunity with Benefits and Services (JOBS) for Success Act (H.R. 5861) to reduce child poverty in the U.S. by amending the bill to include a national goal of cutting child poverty in half within a decade and eliminating it within 20 years.

With 18 percent of children living in poverty in the U.S., we need to do more to ensure that every child lives in a household with enough resources to meet their basic needs and support their healthy development. Research makes clear that money matters to child well-being. Numerous studies¹ show that when family income rises, it has positive effects for healthy child development, including academic achievement and educational attainment.

Yet reaching economic security is a long road for many families. While parents and caregivers are working towards upward mobility, we need to ensure that every family is provided with enough cash assistance to provide sufficient resources for children while their brains are undergoing critical stages of development.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is the only federal program that provides cash assistance for families. The overwhelming majority of TANF recipients are children, yet fewer and fewer children are receiving cash assistance, with just under 25 percentⁱⁱ of all poor families with children receiving cash assistance today. As a result, the effectiveness of TANF in reducing child poverty continues to diminish.

While we are encouraged by the addition of child poverty reduction as an explicit goal of TANF in *Joining Opportunity with Benefits and Services (JOBS) for Success Act*, we are concerned that the changes proposed in H.R. 5861 would not significantly strengthen TANF's ability to reduce child poverty.

Overall, this legislation does not propose to increase funding for the block grant or improve upon the responsiveness of TANF in responding during times of increased need. Without improvements to these aspects of the program, TANF's ability to reduce child poverty in the U.S. remains limited.

Further, the outcome performance measures proposed in the draft only track parental employment and do not include outcomes to track the added goal of lifting children out of poverty. Considering that the overwhelming majority of TANF funds go to children, and 50 percent of TANF cases are "child-only," meaning that only the child in the household is receiving assistance, it is critical that state performance is not only measured on parental employment upon leaving TANF, but also on how many children are lifted out of poverty in all TANF caseloads.

We recommend the inclusion of language from the Child Poverty Reduction Act (H.R. 3381) which establishes a national child poverty target in the U.S., setting the goal of cutting child poverty in half within a decade and eliminating it within 20 years. This would be a significant step towards ensuring that the JOBS for Success Act holds federal, state, and local governments accountable to reducing child poverty in the U.S.

We look forward to working with you on this and other proposals to improve the well-being of America's children and youth.

Sincerely,

First Focus Campaign for Children
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
Child Welfare League of America
National Association of Counties
National Diaper Bank Network
National Association for the Education of Young Children
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

XC: Members of the House Ways & Means Committee

ⁱ Cooper, Kerris and Stewart, Kitty, *Does Money Affect Children's Outcomes? An update*. Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics, available at: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/casepaper203.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Floyd, Ife, Pavetti, LaDonna, and Schott, Liz, "TANF Reaching Few Poor Families," Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, updated December 13, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/tanf-reaching-few-poor-families>.