February 27, 2019

Dear Member of Congress,

We are writing on behalf of the Children's Budget Coalition to congratulate you on your election to the House of Representatives and welcome you to Congress. The Children’s Budget Coalition is made up of over 80 children’s advocacy organizations with priorities across a diverse range of issues who come together to advocate collectively for children to be a top priority in federal budget and appropriations decisions.

Children represent nearly a quarter of America’s population, yet their share of total federal spending is shrinking, hovering around just 8 percent, according to First Focus’ Children’s Budget 2018. Meanwhile, child poverty remains stubbornly high in the United States, with the Census Bureau reporting that 17.5 percent of children (12.8 million) were living in poverty in 2017.1 Experts expect the downward trend in the share of spending on children to continue, and according to the Urban Institute, children’s programs are projected to receive just one cent of every dollar of the projected growth in spending over the next decade.2 A failure to invest in our children jeopardizes our country’s future. In light of these troubling trends, we ask that you take our priorities into consideration during the 116th Congress so that all of our nation’s children have equal opportunity to reach their full potential:

1. **Raise the discretionary spending caps for FY 20 and FY 21 to ensure that essential programs supporting children and families can meet pressing needs and rising costs:** The Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA, P.L. 112-25), by subjecting non-defense discretionary (NDD) spending to unrealistic caps, has stunted growth across an array of critical programs serving children. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (BBA; P.L. 115-123) provided some much-needed relief, increasing discretionary spending caps for FY 18 and FY 19. As a result, Congress made essential investments in children and families. And as noted by committee members and the witnesses at the Budget Committee hearing on February 7, 2019, many of the non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs also help to meet our national security needs further underscoring the importance of timely appropriations decisions. However, the FY 20 cap is slated to decrease NDD spending by $55 billion dollars, almost certainly jeopardizing key programs and services that benefit children and families. A near-term decision on FY 20 and FY 21 annual spending allocations would help to provide adequate time and sufficient funding for Congress to complete all twelve of the annual appropriations bills before the new fiscal year starts on October 1, 2019, without having to resort to draconian cuts. A timely budget caps deal will help reduce uncertainty and disruption in the budget process as well as discourage future government shutdowns.

2. **Increase the 302(b) allocations for the Labor-Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Treasury, Housing and Urban Development, Commerce, Justice and Science, and Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bills, which have jurisdiction over the largest number of NDD programs serving children:** Nearly 80 percent of the 180 programs tracked in Children’s Budget 2018 rely on NDD funding. We need to invest in each aspect of children’s

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wellbeing—but inadequate 302(b) allocations force appropriators to make spending decisions that pit vital children’s programs against each other.

3. Support mandatory programs that help vulnerable children and families afford basic needs including food, housing, health care and income security: We oppose the use of cuts to mandatory programs—whether by reduced funding or restrictive eligibility requirements—as an offset for any increased discretionary investment in children.

4. Make decisions and structural changes that prioritize the needs of children: A variety of pressing issues demand attention, from the need to rebuild our infrastructure, recover from natural disasters, and combat the opioid crisis to skyrocketing healthcare costs and high rates of child poverty. As Congress works to address these critical issues, we ask that you elevate the best interest of the child and ensure that our institutions and resources are dedicated to improving the lives of our nation’s children. The budget process itself contains structural inequalities that disadvantage children’s programs, for which spending is disproportionately discretionary, making it subject to annual debate, cuts, and other legislative changes. Funding for children is often temporary, capped, and lacks both built-in growth and dedicated revenue. We urge Congress to address these structural issues without taking shortcuts, such as automatic continuing resolutions. The use of automatic continuing resolutions likely would deter key discussions to modify spending to benefit our children, prevent lawmakers from reaching closure on important policy and funding decisions, create budgetary uncertainty, and tie the hands of federal agencies to advance existing programs or implement new ones. Automatic continuing resolutions oftentimes result in funding levels that fail to address the real demand for programs and services that impact children and working families as previous year funding levels function as a cut due to inflation and growing needs.

Prioritizing children in budget decisions makes smart economic sense and helps to ensure they all have a fair chance to succeed. As negotiations for FY 20 begin, we invite you to lead the way in addressing these issues so that every child can thrive, and we can build off the priorities reflected in the 2018 BBA.

We look forward to working with you on these issues and hope that you will look to the Children’s Budget Coalition as a resource.

Signed,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Afterschool Alliance
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers
American Psychological Association
Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Bread for the World
Campaign for Youth Justice
CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
Child Care Aware of America
Child Labor Coalition
Child welfare League of America
Children's Aid
Children’s Health Fund
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Coalition on Human Needs
Committee for Children
Communities in Schools National Office
Early Care and Education Consortium
Families USA
Family Focused Treatment Association
First Focus Campaign for Children
Jumpstart
March of Dimes
Mental Health America
MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership
MomsRising
Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
National Network for Youth
National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement (NAFSCE)
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of School Nurses
National Center for Healthy Housing
National Consumers League
National Education Association
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform
National Respite Coalition
National WIC Association
National Writing Project
Nurse-Family Partnership
Partnership for America's Children
Prevent Blindness
Public Advocacy for Kids
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network
School-Based Health Alliance
SchoolHouse Connection
The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights
United Way Worldwide
Voice for Adoption
Voices for Progress
Youth Development Institute of Puerto Rico