October 3, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20002

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20002

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
United States House of Representatives
2486 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy,

We, the undersigned members of the Children’s Budget Coalition, write to urge you to prioritize children and families while negotiating the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 302(b) allocations to provide adequate funding for programs that benefit our nation’s youth. The Children’s Budget Coalition is comprised of over 80 child-focused organizations who collectively advocate to ensure that our nation’s policymakers prioritize children in federal budget decisions and the annual appropriations process.

While much of spending on adults is mandatory, spending on children is disproportionately discretionary.1 This means that the annual appropriations process has an immense impact on programs supporting children and families, and therefore interruptions in the process or inadequate annual funding harms children disproportionately. Such serious concerns underscore the importance of prioritizing our children in spending decisions to ensure they can overcome the many, difficult challenges facing them. Just last week, data from the US Census confirmed that child poverty remains high with a rate of 16.2 percent, and that children are far more likely to experience poverty than adults.

Unfortunately, in recent years, the share of federal spending on children has declined to an all-time low of just 7.21 percent – a near 10 percent decline since FY 2015.2 Furthermore, spending on children is not keeping pace with inflation, which means that between FY 2018 and FY 2019, total spending on children experienced an inflation-adjusted cut of nearly 1 percent.3 Without immediate congressional action to reverse these trends, funding for critical children’s services and programs will continue to lose ground, and we will struggle to provide our nation’s children with the resources they need to thrive and succeed.

3 Ibid.
In the coming days and weeks, we urge you to reverse this downward spending trend while reconciling the 302(b) allocations passed in the House and proposed in the Senate for FY 2020 appropriations bills. Four bills in particular – Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (Labor-H), Transportation and Housing and Urban Development (T-HUD), Commerce, Justice and Science (CJS), and Agriculture and Food and Drug Administration (Ag-FDA) – are of utmost importance to children and families, as they together accounted for 98.82 percent of Non-Defense Discretionary (NDD) spending on children in FY 2019. That being said, we support the allocations offered in the House for the Labor-H, T-HUD, and Ag-FDA bills and those offered in the Senate for the CJS bill, as all of these bills provide higher funding levels than their counterparts in the other chamber.

Furthermore, we urge Congress to pass appropriations bills promptly to avoid continuing resolutions and another devastating government shutdown. The historic government shutdown experienced last January seriously harmed the economic security, health, and well-being of low-income children and families who participate in vital government programs, and another shutdown must be avoided so critical federal services for our children are not jeopardized. Similarly, the recent pattern of multiple stopgap funding measures has created unpredictable and inadequate program funding that fails to keep pace with inflation and inhibits agencies from planning ahead to address the pressing needs of our children and families.

The members of the Children’s Budget Coalition recognize the importance of using a comprehensive approach to prioritizing children in federal spending decisions. This relies heavily on adequate 302(b) allocations for those subcommittees contributing the vast majority of NDD spending on children. The coming negotiations represent a meaningful opportunity for Congress to reverse the unfortunate trends of spending on children, elevate them as a priority in budget decisions, and we stand ready to work with you.

Sincerely,

1,000 Days
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Afterschool Alliance
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
American Academy of Pediatrics
Campaign for Youth Justice
Child Care Aware of America
Child Welfare League of America
Children’s Advocacy Institute
Children's Aid
Children's Health Fund
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
City Year Inc.
Coalition on Human Needs
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
Committee for Children
Communities in Schools National Office
Early Care and Education Consortium
First Focus Campaign for Children
Foster Family Treatment Association
Futures Without Violence
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 Association for Family, School and Community Engagement (NAFSCE)
National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators
National Association of School Nurses
National Center for Healthy Housing
National Child Care Association
National Diaper Bank Network
National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
National Education Association
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform
National Head Start Association
National Network for Youth
National Respite Coalition
National WIC Association
National Writing Project
Nurse-Family Partnership
Partnership for America's Children
Policy & Performance Consultants, Inc.
Prevent Blindness
Public Advocacy for Kids
Save the Children Action Network
SchoolHouse Connection
United Way Worldwide
Voice for Adoption
YMCA of the USA
Youth Villages