

February 24, 2025

The Honorable John Thune  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Mike Johnson  
Speaker  
U.S. House

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House

Dear Leader Thune, Leader Schumer, Speaker Johnson, and Leader Jeffries:

As Congress considers the significant pressures on and potential changes to health and human services programs this year, the undersigned 384 national, state, tribal, and local organizations look forward to partnering with you to enhance and preserve key programs intended to strengthen families, to prevent children and youth from entering the child welfare system and to help older youth bridge the tenuous transition from the foster care system.

These programs support a significant population of children and families. Each year, millions of families come into contact with the child welfare system. Many more do not because they receive mentoring and support from extended family and faith-based and community resources as well as critical services that are supported by the federal government,— such as substance use and mental health treatment, access to basic needs, and community-based, family-centered services. Nearly 600,000 children spend time in foster care each year, with nearly 370,000 children in foster care on a given day. More than 18,000 youth age out of foster care each year, with 50,000 children adopted from foster care, and more than 100,000 awaiting adoption.<sup>1</sup> Over 2.4 million children are living with kinship caregivers, such as a grandparent or other relative.<sup>2</sup>

We are grateful for Congress' demonstrated commitment to and sustained bipartisan policymaking and investment in children and families. We share your commitment to improved outcomes for children and their families by maximizing the use of public resources to: support families at the earliest signal of need before a crisis occurs, keep children at home with their families whenever possible to avoid unnecessary foster care and a traumatizing and costly government intervention, prioritize kinship care, and promote youth remaining in or close to home in family like settings as they receive supports. The following critical federal programs support a family-focused array of services that keep children and parents together and prevent unnecessary government disruption of families and system involvement.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. "The AFCARS Report," (2024). Available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcars-report-30.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.gu.org/explore-our-topics/grandfamilies/>

### *Medicaid*

Medicaid covers 41 percent of all births and nearly half of all children.<sup>3</sup> For children and families in or at risk of entering the child welfare system, Medicaid plays an even more central role. Nearly all children in foster care have coverage through Medicaid, which is important because up to 80 percent of children entering foster care have significant mental health needs, and one-third have a chronic health condition. Medicaid's comprehensive coverage is critical for addressing those needs, particularly with the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit.

Medicaid also addresses the ongoing opioid epidemic's role driving foster care placements. As many as two-thirds of children who enter foster care have a parent with a substance use disorder. By complementing other federal programs, including services supported by the bipartisan *Family First Prevention Services Act* (P.L. 115-123), Medicaid helps parents access treatment that can keep families safely together as envisioned by Congress through the SUPPORT Act and Family First.<sup>4,5</sup>

Medicaid is also essential for supporting kinship and adoptive families. Approximately a third of children in foster care are in kinship care<sup>6</sup> with a relative or other adult with whom they have a meaningful relationship. These caregivers often have limited financial means, and Medicaid ensures families can access needed health services for their children who have experienced significant trauma. Additionally, children with special needs adopted from foster care receive Medicaid.<sup>7,8</sup> Adoptive families rely on this comprehensive access to keep their families stable and healthy.

### *Social Services Block Grant*

The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) represents 10 percent of annual federal child welfare spending, providing \$1.7 billion annually for a wide array of upstream, community-based supports and services aimed at helping children and families thrive and preventing future child welfare system involvement.<sup>9</sup> It does this by providing flexible dollars to states to promote economic self-sufficiency, prevent and address child abuse and exploitation, and prevent and reduce unnecessary institutionalization.

SSBG funds access to childcare, supports for youth in foster care, services to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect, family-centered substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, family resource

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<sup>3</sup> KFF- <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/10-things-to-know-about-medicaid/#:~:text=Medicaid%20covers%2041%25%20of%20all,43%25>

<sup>4</sup> <https://preventionservices.acf.hhs.gov/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.medicaid.gov/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/cib100520.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> AFCARS, 2024

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. "Implementation Guide: Medicaid State Plan Eligibility, Eligibility Groups- Mandatory Coverage, Children with Title IV-E Adoption Assistance, Foster Care, or Guardianship Care. Available at <https://www.medicaid.gov/resources-for-states/downloads/macpro-ig-children-with-title-ive-adoption-assistance-foster-care-guardianship-care.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. "Child Welfare Policy Manual," See 8.2B.11 available at

[https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/public\\_html/programs/cb/laws\\_policies/laws/cwpm/policy\\_dsp.jsp?citID=49](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/public_html/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp.jsp?citID=49)

<sup>9</sup> [https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ChildWelfareFinancingReport\\_ChildTrends\\_May2023.pdf](https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ChildWelfareFinancingReport_ChildTrends_May2023.pdf)

centers, and many supports for relative caregivers raising children through kinship care. In the most recent year for which data are available, SSBG served 7 million individuals, including 2 million children.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families*

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program represents 19 percent of federal child welfare spending.<sup>11</sup> Cuts to the TANF program would significantly affect state and tribal child welfare budgets and have a negative impact on children in kinship care and foster care. TANF is also a critical program for preventing both child abuse and neglect and unnecessary child welfare system involvement.

Congress' enactment of the *Protecting America's Children by Strengthening Families Act* (P.L. 118-258) in December included a bipartisan emphasis on ensuring poverty, in and of itself, is not reported or responded to as neglect, and expanding access to non-recurrent short-term economic assistance to stabilize families in crisis. TANF is a critical source of that type of support, and is vital to ensuring financial shocks do not become the kind of crisis that can lead a family into unnecessary child welfare system involvement and foster care. When families have greater access to the resources in TANF, there is less child abuse and neglect and foster care. Not only is this what's best for families, it also is a less expensive way to intervene.

#### *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) served 42 million individuals in 2024.<sup>12</sup> Approximately half of SNAP beneficiaries are children.<sup>13</sup> Recent changes to SNAP benefits have offered a natural experiment in which to see the impact of reduced SNAP benefits; when enhanced SNAP benefits became optional in 2021, the 17 states that opted out had higher rates of households with SNAP benefits consistently reporting they "sometimes" or "often" did not have enough food to eat relative to states that retained enhanced benefits.<sup>14</sup>

Recognizing the value of SNAP, in 2023 Congress took bipartisan action to ensure access to SNAP for youth aging out of foster care, which can be a vital lifeline for that transition. Like TANF, SNAP provides families with critical support for promoting economic stability and success. This stability reduces the likelihood of maltreatment and unnecessary foster care.

As Congress considers any potential changes to funding or policy for these and other important programs serving children and families, we urge you to engage directly with children, youth and families with lived experience so they can underscore what worked for them and the important role federal

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/fact-sheet/ssbg-fact-sheet>

<sup>11</sup> [https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ChildWelfareFinancingReport\\_ChildTrends\\_May2023.pdf](https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ChildWelfareFinancingReport_ChildTrends_May2023.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/snap-annualsummary-1.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/key-statistics-and-research>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/04/impact-of-the-end-of-extra-snap-benefits.html>

policies and investments plays in supporting safe and stable families, minimizing unnecessary governmental intrusion into families, and preventing unnecessary foster care or out-of-home placements.

Thank you for your continued bipartisan collaboration in service of children and families. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to Zach Laris at [zach@bolderhorizon.org](mailto:zach@bolderhorizon.org).

Sincerely,

**National Organizations**

Access Ready, Inc.  
Action for Child Protection  
AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Psychological Association Services  
American Public Health Association  
American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC)  
Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Association of Children's Residential & Community Services (ACRC)  
Autistic Self Advocacy Network  
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Bolder Horizon  
Boys Town  
CarePortal  
Center for the Study of Social Policy  
Child First  
Child Welfare League of America  
Children's Advocacy Institute  
Children's Defense Fund  
Children's Rights  
Children's Trust Fund Alliance  
Civil Rights Corps  
Clarvida  
Co-Executive Editor, GrandFamilies online Journal  
Coalition on Human Needs  
CommunicationFIRST  
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces  
Congressional Research Institute for Social Work Policy  
Corporation for Supportive Housing  
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption  
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)  
Families Rising  
Family Centered Treatment Foundation  
Family Equality

Family Focused Treatment Association  
First Focus Campaign for Children  
Foster Care Alumni of America  
Foster Focus Magazine  
Foster Love  
FosterClub  
Futures Without Violence  
Generations United  
Healthy Families America  
Healthy Teen Network  
iFoster  
Justice and Joy National Collaborative (formerly National Crittenton)  
Juvenile Law Center  
Kidsave  
Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Association of Counsel for Children  
National Association of County Human Services Administrators  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Center on Adoption and Permanency  
National Diaper Bank Network  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Family Preservation Network  
National Family Resource Center Coalition  
National Family Support Network  
National Head Start Association  
National Health Law Program  
National Indian Child Welfare Association  
National League for Nursing  
National Safe Place Network  
National Youth Advocate Program, Inc.  
North American Family Institute  
Nurse-Family Partnership  
Omni Family Institute  
Parents as Teachers  
Parents as Teachers National Center  
Parents as Teachers WV region 5  
Prevent Child Abuse America  
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)  
SchoolHouse Connection  
Specialized Alternatives for Families and Youth of America, Inc.  
TASH  
The Advocacy Institute  
The Bair Foundation - Kindred Roots  
The Institute for Human Services  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health/Got Transition  
The Omni Family of Services

The Ray E. Helfer Society  
Think of Us  
Union for Reform Judaism  
University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work  
Voice for Adoption  
Women of Reform Judaism  
Youth Law Center  
Youth Villages  
Zero to Three  
11:11 Media Impact

### **State and Local Organizations**

#### **Alabama**

Alabama Chapter-American Academy of Pediatrics  
Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers  
Children's Aid Society of AL  
Healthy Families Tuscaloosa  
VOICES for Alabama's Children

#### **Alaska**

Alaska Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Alaska Children's Trust

#### **Arizona**

Arizona Council of Human Service Providers  
Children's Action Alliance  
Prevent Child Abuse Arizona

#### **Arkansas**

Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Child Welfare Scholar and Advocate

#### **California**

AAP-Orange County Chapter  
American Academy of Pediatrics, CA Chapter 3  
Boys Republic  
California Alliance of Child and Family Services  
California Family Life Center  
California Family Resource Association  
Child Abuse Prevention Center  
Child & Family Center  
County of San Diego HHSA  
County Welfare Directors Association of California

Families Uniting Families  
John Burton Advocates for Youth  
Koinonia Family Services  
Latino Family Insitute  
Maryvale  
Prevent Child Abuse California  
Prevention Partnership International  
Redwood Community Services  
Sacramento County  
Safe & Sound  
SAY San Diego  
School of Social Work at California State University Long Beach  
St. Anne's Family Services  
Stanford Sierra Youth & Families  
Walden Family Services  
Wayfinder Family Services  
Seneca Family of Agencies

### **Colorado**

American Academy of Pediatrics, Colorado Chapter  
Beautiful Redemption  
Clayton Early Learning

### **Connecticut**

Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families  
Mothers Of Victim's Equality Inc.  
NAFI Connecticut, Inc

### **Delaware**

Children & Families First DE  
Delaware Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Prevent Child Abuse Delaware

### **District of Columbia**

American Academy of Pediatrics, DC Chapter  
DC Children's Trust Fund  
Plaza West Grandfamilies  
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSSNCA)

### **Florida**

Florida Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics, Inc.

### **Georgia**

American Academy of Pediatrics - Georgia Chapter

Together Georgia  
Voices for Georgia's Children  
Wellroot Family Services

### **Hawaii**

Hawaii Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Hawaii Children's Action Network

### **Idaho**

Idaho Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Prevent Child Abuse Idaho

### **Illinois**

Ascend Justice  
Aunt Martha's Healthy Families of America  
Garden of Prayer Youth Center  
Illinois Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics  
Kids Above All  
One Hope United  
Prevent Child Abuse Illinois  
Rincon Family Services  
Shelter, Inc  
UCAN

### **Indiana**

Adoptions of Indiana  
First Things First Porter County  
Foster Success  
Healthy Families  
Indiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Iris Family Support Center  
Paddock View Residential Center, Inc.

### **Iowa**

Iowa Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Iowa Family Resource Collaborative  
Lutheran Services in Iowa  
YPN

### **Kansas**

Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center  
Kansas Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics  
Keystone Learning Services  
Saint Francis Ministries



## **Kentucky**

Children's Alliance of Kentucky  
Kentucky Chapter of the AAP  
Kentucky United Methodist Children's Homes  
Key Assets Kentucky, Inc.  
Maryhurst  
Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky  
Second Mile Behavioral Health  
Sunrise Children's Services

## **Louisiana**

Bayou Lotus  
Clover New Orleans  
Kennedy's Child Care Academy  
Louisiana Family Resource Centers Network  
Speaking 2 Inspire thru Experience

## **Maine**

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc. & The Kinship Program  
American Academy of Pediatrics, Maine Chapter  
Maine Children's Alliance  
Maine Children's Trust

## **Maryland**

Bowman Therapeutics  
Fathers Fighting 4 Fathers Community Mentorship  
Healthy Families Dorchester  
Maryland Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP)  
Paths for Families  
Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts at the University of Baltimore, School of Law  
The Children's Home  
The Choice Program at UMBC  
The Karabelle Pizzigati Initiative in Advocacy for Children, Youth and Families at the University of Maryland

## **Massachusetts**

Ascentria Care Alliance  
Boston University  
Bridges Homeward  
Children's League of Massachusetts  
Friends of Children, Inc.  
HopeWell  
Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
NFI Massachusetts, Inc.

**Michigan**

Christ Child House  
Konnected with Care (KWC)  
Lapeer County Health Department  
MCHS Family of Services  
Michigan Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health  
Michigan League for Public Policy  
Michigan Office of the Child Advocate  
Parenting Communities  
St. Clair County Health Department  
Tynes Co

**Minnesota**

LifeCare Public Health  
Minnesota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

**Mississippi**

Be Better Now Mentorship and Development

**Missouri**

Children's Trust Fund  
Missouri Coalition for Children

**Montana**

Missoula Public Health  
Montana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Watson Children's Shelter  
Zero to Five Montana

**Nebraska**

Nebraska Appleseed  
Nebraska Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Voices for Children in Nebraska

**Nevada**

Bamboo Sunrise, LLC  
Children's Advocacy Alliance (Nevada)  
Foster Kinship  
Nevada Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Tru Vista Foundation

## **New Hampshire**

NFI North  
NHAAP  
Waypoint

## **New Jersey**

Acenda Integrated Health  
Advocates for Children of New Jersey  
Care Plus NJ  
Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of New Jersey, Inc.  
New Jersey Alliance for Children, Youth and Families  
New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Parents as Teachers

## **New Mexico**

New Mexico Pediatric Society  
Pegasus Legal Services for Children

## **New York**

Children's Aid  
City Living NY  
Dominican Women's Development Center  
Elmcrest Children's Center  
Graham Windham  
Healthy Families Jefferson/Lewis/St. Lawrence Counties  
JCCA  
Lawyers For Children  
New York State Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health  
NYS AAP - Chapter 2  
NYS AAP - Chapter 3  
Parent Advisory Council Early Childhood Alliance  
The Children's Village  
The New York Foundling

## **North Carolina**

Benchmarks  
Children's Home Society of NC  
Family Service of the Piedmont  
NC Child  
NC Pediatric Society  
Positive Childhood Alliance North Carolina (previously, Prevent Child Abuse NC)  
Rapid Resource for FAMILIES

## **North Dakota**

North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association

## **Ohio**

Adams County Children Services  
Athens County Children Services  
Allen County Children Services  
Ashtabula County Children Services Board  
Brown County Job and Family Services  
Champaign County Department of Job and Family Services  
Clinton County Job and Family Services  
Delaware County Family and Children First Council  
Delaware County Job & Family Services  
Directions for Youth & Families  
Fairfield County Job & Family Services - Protective Services  
Fayette County Dept. Job and Family Services  
Geauga County Job and Family Services  
Harrison County (Ohio) Department of Job and Family Services  
Healthy Moms and Babies  
Highland County Job and Family Services  
Logan County Children's Services  
Lorain County Children Services  
Lucas County Children Services Board  
Mahoning County Children Services  
Morgan County Job and Family Services  
Morrow County Job and Family Services  
Muskingum County Adult and Child Protective Services  
Ohio Chapter, AAP  
Public Children Services Association of Ohio  
Sandusky County Dept of Job and Family Services  
Scioto County Dept. of Job & Family Services  
Shelby County Dept of Job and Family Services  
Trumbull County Children Services  
Tuscarawas County Job and Family Services  
Wyandot County Children's Services

## **Oklahoma**

OK Turning Point Council - Policy  
Oklahoma Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

## **Oregon**

Oregon Pediatric Society  
Prevent Child Abuse Oregon

## **Pennsylvania**

Child Welfare Education & Research Programs  
PA Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
PA Council of Children, Youth & Family Services  
Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers State Office  
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children  
The Center for Children's Justice (C4CJ)  
Voices for Children Coalition

## **Rhode Island**

Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

## **South Carolina**

Able SC  
Children's Trust of South Carolina  
Fostering Great Ideas  
HALOS (South Carolina)  
South Carolina Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

## **South Dakota**

South Dakota Chapter of The American Academy of Pediatrics

## **Tennessee**

Tennessee Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

## **Texas**

Texans Care for Children  
Texas Grandparents Raising Grandchildren  
Texas Pediatric Society  
TexProtects

## **Utah**

4 The Youth Inc.  
Children's Service Society of Utah  
Prevent Child Abuse Utah  
Voices for Utah Children

## **Vermont**

KidSafe Collaborative  
NFI Vermont, Inc.  
Prevent Child Abuse Vermont  
Vermont Foodbank

Vermont Kin as Parents  
Voices for Vermont's Children

### **Virginia**

Amelia Department of Social Services  
Brunswick County Dept. of Social Services  
Charlottesville Department of Social Services  
Charles City County Department of Social Services  
Children's Home Society of Virginia  
City of Petersburg Department of Social Services  
Department of Healthy Families  
Families Forward Virginia  
Franklin City Department of Social Services Advisory Board  
Gloucester County Department of Social Services  
Lancaster County Children's Services Act (CSA) Program  
Northumberland Department of Social Services  
Roanoke County Dept. of Social Services  
VA Organizing  
Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Virginia League of Social Services Executives

### **Washington**

AKin  
Partners for Our Children  
Seneca Family of Agencies  
Treehouse  
WA Assoc for Children and Families  
Washington Family Support Network

### **West Virginia**

Healthy Families Mountain State  
TEAM for West Virginia Children  
West Virginia Child Care Association

### **Wisconsin**

Bay View Community Center  
Burnett County Family Resource Center, Inc.  
Child Care Resource and Referral  
Children's Wisconsin  
Family Connections, Inc.  
Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Waaswaaganing Nindoodem  
Healthy Families Burnett County  
Lac Courte Oreilles Tribal Mino Maajisewin HV Program  
LIFE Wellness and Counseling Services  
Thriving Wisconsin

United Way of Sheboygan County  
Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (WIAAP)

**Wyoming**

Wyoming Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics