

# United States Senate

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
United States Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
United States Senate Committee on Appropriations

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby, and Vice Chairman Leahy:

As you consider an additional emergency recovery package in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating impacts, we urge you to provide crucial support to some of America's most vulnerable children, youth, and families by equipping the child welfare system with the tools it needs to handle this crisis.

We must act swiftly to increase funding to strengthen the systems that prevent and respond to child abuse and address the needs of children, youth, and families in the foster care system. The impacts of COVID-19 are creating challenges for families who are navigating new public health safety protocols, school closures, uncertain childcare arrangements, job losses, social isolation, and significant barriers to many critical support services. Furthermore, school closures, fewer routine medical visits, and reduced mobility in the community are drastically increasing the difficulty of identifying children suffering from abuse.

Investing in programs that support families and keep children safe is more important than ever. Existing federal programs with infrastructure and expertise are already in place to address these challenges. However, they currently lack the financial support to effectively combat the new challenges presented by this crisis. We urge you to include the following solutions to support families and ensure vulnerable children are safe as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

We respectfully request that Congressional negotiators act swiftly to:

- Support families and keep children safe from abuse and neglect.
  - **Increase funding for CAPTA Title II Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CB-CAP) grants by \$1 billion** to deploy resources directly to local prevention services and programs and ensure state and local child protection systems can adapt to these new circumstances. These funds can help provide community-based services in all 50 states to prevent child abuse and neglect. These services include: state child abuse hotlines, voluntary home visiting programs, parent support programs, baby pantries, food and medication distribution, family resource centers, and respite care services.

- **Increase funding for Title IV-B, Part 2, the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF), by \$1 billion** to help stabilize families, eliminate the need for out-of-home placements, and support foster parents caring for youth.
- **Apply any FMAP rate increases to the Title IV-E Prevention Program.** The recent temporary increase in FMAP passed by Congress applies to Title IV-E Foster Care, Adoption Assistance, and Guardianship Assistance, but excludes the new Title IV-E Prevention Program established under the *Family First Prevention Services Act*. If the federal funding rate for the IV-E Prevention Program is not commensurately increased, it could incentivize unnecessary foster care placements at a time when disrupting families brings additional dangers.
- **Increase funding for the Social Services Block Grant** to help states fill in gaps to social services including child protective services, child abuse prevention supports, domestic violence services, and foster care. These funds are flexible and can be tailored to meet the needs of the community.
- Strengthen child welfare response systems and support youth in care.
  - **Increase funding for CAPTA Title I by \$500 million** to help ensure the child protection workforce has the necessary technology and PPE to prevent the interruption of crucial support services and adapt to new circumstances.
  - **Increase funding for Title IV-E Chafee by \$500 million** to provide states with the necessary flexibility to expand supports and services for older youth already in, or transitioning out of, the foster care system in the face of this pandemic.
  - **Increase funding to the Court Improvement Program (CIP) by \$30 million** to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the functioning of child welfare court cases. CIP is the only source of federal funding for state courts related to child welfare. Court shutdowns will result in delayed hearings, which may lead to compromised child safety, delayed family reunification, and the failure other critical supports to child victims and their families.
  - **Increase funding for the Kinship Navigator Programs by \$20 million** to provide additional connections to resources designed to help families where grandparents and other relatives are raising children. Increased funding would help respond to the heightened demand for supplies, information, and assistance for these families where caregivers are at high risk of death or severe illness if exposed to the virus.

As policymakers, we must bolster protections for our most vulnerable children and families during this uncertain time. These targeted programs are crucial to ensure the safety and well-being of children, and to help families navigate new challenges throughout this pandemic. We thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

# United States Senate

/s/ Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

/s/ Doug Jones  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed  
United States Senator

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith  
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator