

Currently, the United States does not have a comprehensive framework that governs the rights of the child. As a result, the essential needs of thousands of children are not met, and standards relating to the health, safety, and well-being of children are applied unevenly across jurisdictions.

The provisions in the Children's Bill of Rights, introduced by Rep. Luis Gutiérrez, Rep. Karen Bass, and Rep. Judy Chu, are centered around three core areas paramount to the healthy development of a child. Rights under each of these core areas should be considered each time decisions are made concerning children so that every child can thrive in a safe and stable environment. In addition, children are entitled to these rights regardless of their gender, class, race, ethnicity, national origin, culture, religion, immigration status, sexual orientation, or ability.

Physical Well-Being

In the United States, a significant number of children face unimaginable situations that threaten their physical well-being. In 2014, 1,640 children died due to abuse and neglect; 19.9 percent of children lived in poverty; and 8.58 million children lived in households that were food insecure. Studies also find that more than 100,000 children are sexually trafficked each year, many of whom are prosecuted for crimes they could not consent to, and they are unable to access rehabilitative services.

To improve these outcomes, the Children's Bill of Rights includes:

- The right to be free from all forms of physical, psychological, sexual abuse, or neglect;
- The right to a safe and healthy environment;
- The right to receive appropriate medical treatment including therapeutic care for behavioral health.

Social and Emotional Well-Being

The voice of children is often lost in legal proceedings and case planning meetings where decisions are made that concern their well-being. Lack of legal representation and a child advocate may result in decisions not in the best interest of the child.

The following are some of the rights that promote the ability of children to participate in the decision-making processes that affect them:

- The right to develop a healthy attachment to a parent, legal guardian, or caregiver;
- The right to a voice in matters that affect them, including representation on age-appropriate youth councils and other decision-making bodies;
- The right to have a child's best interest taken into consideration with regards to decisions that affect them and to have legal representation and a child advocate in legal proceedings;
- The right to rehabilitative services and periodic review if detained or incarcerated as a juvenile; The right to have parents, elected officials, and other adults consider the impact that their decisions will have on their care and communities.

Educational and Life Skills

Education and participation in life-training experiences is fundamental in preparing children for adulthood. However, across the United States, the quality and educational opportunities available to children greatly varies.

The following rights highlight the need for meaningful education opportunities and community engagement so all children have an equal opportunity to become successful adults:

- The right to access educational services and supports necessary to accommodate their individual needs;
- The right to be heard in age-appropriate ways on issues regarding their education;
- The right of access to training in life skills;
- The right to protections from unfair and unsafe labor practices in the workforce.