

To candidates and elected officials:

As advocates for children, we represent more than 74 million young people in the U.S. Kids can't vote, and they don't have SuperPACs, but they are our future.

We face concurrent crises of COVID-19 spread, economic instability, and the ongoing impact of racist policies. This is a watershed moment that will affect every child in our country, and business as usual is not an option. Children are calling on us to meet the moment.

The budget and policy decisions we make today will impact kids' futures in ways we can't yet fathom: Will we give all children access to the technology they need to learn? Will we safely reopen schools? Will we ensure that every child has healthcare and nutritious food? Will we make high-quality childcare accessible for families returning to work? Will we dismantle racist systems that cause inequity in healthcare and education?

Will we not merely sustain, but invest in our nation's children?

We, the undersigned, are calling upon sitting and aspiring lawmakers to rise to the moment and commit to kids.

Budgets and policies reflect our priorities. We are asking to see our sitting and aspiring leaders' plans to address the following issue areas:

(1) **Child Poverty:** The U.S. has the research and resources to reduce child poverty, yet in 2018, 11.9 million children were living in poverty. Due to persistent institutional racism, Black and Hispanic children experience poverty at nearly three times the rate of white children. Our leaders must have a plan to end child poverty.

(2) **Housing:** Every child deserves a safe place to live. Public schools identified more than 1.5 million children experiencing homelessness in 2017-18, a 10 percent increase from the previous year, and shelter in place orders only magnified the importance of safe housing for kids. Our leaders must have a plan to secure housing for all.

(3) **Early Childhood Care and Education:** Early childhood is a critical time for development and learning. Our leaders must have a plan to ensure that all families have access to high-quality, affordable childcare and high-quality education.

(4) **Health Care:** Public health has never been more vulnerable, and an estimated half a million children could lose health coverage during this pandemic. Our leaders must have a plan to guarantee health coverage for all children.

(5) **Nutrition:** Schools closures, and the subsequent loss of school-provided meals, have highlighted unprecedented rates of food insecurity for children. Our leaders must have to plan to make sure no child in the United States goes hungry.

(6) **Child Welfare:** Children are at an increased risk of maltreatment as families face economic, health, parental, and employment-related stressors during the pandemic. Our leaders must have a plan to protect children from abuse and neglect.

(7) **Immigration:** The current administration treats immigrant children and families reprehensibly. Our leaders must have a plan to enact and uphold a “best interest of the child” standard for all immigration decisions.

(8) **Budget:** Out of every \$100 the federal government spends in FY2020, only \$7.48 goes to children. To successfully enact the policies above, our leaders must prioritize children in federal budget decisions.

(9) **Representation in Government:** Finally, we ask that our leaders designate advocates for children in government. Many countries have successfully established a Children’s Commissioner, an independent office that holds the government accountable to protecting and investing in children.

The pandemic has exposed deep inequities in our nation’s social and economic infrastructure: from healthcare to housing insecurity, American children and families are feeling the ripple effects of this crisis.

Many of us took comfort in early reports that kids are less likely to contract the virus or suffer long-term health impacts. Now it’s clear that the health risks are not so simple — kids *are* at risk, albeit in different ways — and that the threats of COVID-19 extend far beyond physical health outcomes.

Gambling with the well-being of our kids and their families is unacceptable. We need you, our elected and aspiring leaders, to have plans and policies that account for the unique concerns and circumstances facing children.

We have committed to fighting for kids. **Will you?**

This letter was organized by First Focus on Children.

Signatories:

Alliance for Early Success

Alliance for Strong Families and Communities

Baby’s Bounty

Child Labor Coalition

Child Welfare League of America
Children's Advocacy Alliance
Children's HealthWatch
Chippewa Valley Child Poverty Coalition
Coalition for Community Schools
Every Child Matters
Early Childhood Investment Corporation
Family Focused Treatment Association
First 5 Association of California
Futures Without Violence
Global Children's Campaign
Groundwork Ohio
Hawaii Children's Action Network
Hope Supply Co.
Institute for Educational Leadership
Kentucky Youth Advocates
Kids Impact Initiative
MENTOR
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of ESEA State Program
Administrators
National Center on Adoption and Permanency
National Children's Campaign
National Diaper Bank Network
National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
National Network for Youth
National WIC Association
New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction
Agencies
Ohio Children's Alliance
Our Children Oregon
Partners for Our Children

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Prevent Blindness

Prevent Child Abuse Illinois

Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)

RESULTS

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Save the Children Action Network

School-Based Health Alliance

Share Our Strength

Social Action Linking Together (SALT)

United Way of Buffalo and Erie County

Urban Colors Arts and Mentoring

Voices for Illinois Children

Voices for Vermont's Children

Voices for Virginia's Children

Volunteers of America Northern New England

Wisconsin Council of Churches

ZERO TO THREE