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April 30, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden Jr.
Office of the President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Kamala D. Harris
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris:

On behalf of First Focus on Children, I would like to congratulate and thank you for a momentous first 100 days in office. The Administration inherited a country in the middle of a pandemic, economic hardship, and state of division. Your leadership from Day 1 in office has shown that when we face things together, we are able to address the toughest of challenges and build back better.

As a leading advocacy voice for children, First Focus on Children would like to specifically acknowledge your work uplifting children and youth. The American Rescue Plan (ARP), The American Families Plan, and other initiatives set by the White House within this short time period have demonstrated your commitment to kids. Our organization is especially grateful for the proposed legislation in the American Families Plan, calling it potentially [“the most important piece of legislation for children and families to ever be enacted into law.”](#) We are optimistic that you will continue to prioritize children, and we look forward to working together to create a reality in which every child can live a healthy, safe, and successful life.

To celebrate your first 100 days in office, we would like to mark this occasion by acknowledging the great work the Biden-Harris Administration has accomplished so far, and share what we see as urgent next steps to take in order to build upon the progress made in those areas. The following is a list of successes and priorities for children:

Invest In Kids

In the first 100 days, President Biden released a budget summary brief that proposes a nearly 16% increase in non-defense discretionary spending, including significant proposals to increase investments in nutrition, education, healthcare, child care and early learning, child welfare, juvenile justice and immigration. These increases would reverse the decade-long disinvestment put in place by the Budget Control Act of 2011, which expired last year. As the President has often said, “Don’t tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I’ll tell you what you value.” Clearly, the President has made investments in children a priority and shows he values their now and their future.

In the next 100 days, we stand in strong support of enactment of the American Families Plan and to enact an increased share of federal investments in children's programs and services by at least 1 percentage point. This would reverse years of a downward spending trend on our children and raise the federal share of spending on kids to at least 8.3 percent, which was the children’s share in the last Obama-Biden fiscal year (FY) 2017 budget, from the 7.3 percent requested in the Trump-Pence FY 2021 budget.

Child Poverty/Family Economics

In the first 100 days, and as one of his first announcements in January, President Biden proposed the American Rescue Plan (ARP) that resulted in historic, although temporary, improvements to the Child Tax Credit (CTC), the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC), and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). These crucial policy changes would help reach lower income children previously left behind, reduce child poverty by nearly 50 percent, address racial inequities in the tax code, help parents and families meet the rising costs of child care, and bring some economic security to millions of households with children as well as qualified foster and homeless youth.

On April 28, the President proposed his American Families Plan to invest in our nation's "human infrastructure," that boldly calls for making the CDCTC and EITC expansions permanent along with the "full refundability" component of the CTC improvements.

In the next 100 days, we urge the Administration to support efforts to [make all the temporary CTC improvements in the American Rescue Plan permanent](#), and include all children, regardless of immigration status. In addition to child tax improvements, we would like to see the Administration issue an executive order establishing a Child Poverty Target, which will ensure leaders and policymakers keep striving to reduce the number of children living in poverty.

Health Care Coverage

In the first 100 days, the national effort to vaccinate hundreds of millions of Americans with the Covid-19 vaccine serves as a true success. The vaccinations offer us protection and relief from the danger and worry of contracting the virus. Also, the Administration directed federal agencies to reconsider policies and rules that limit access and enrollment in Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) including ending the public charge rule and denying work requirements for Medicaid. These actions offer protection from being uninsured during a pandemic and after years of coverage losses.

In the next 100 days, or less, we hope to see [a plan designed and implemented to vaccinate children against Covid-19 with a robust campaign and preparation for distribution to reach all children](#). Additionally, we hope to see legislation signed that makes CHIP permanent because we should never allow the health coverage of millions of children to expire, as it did during the Trump Administration. We hope to see the end of all waivers and guidance from the Trump's Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that limit access to care, including the Medicaid block grant guidance.

Maternal Health

In the first 100 days, the Administration showed its support for maternal health by including provisions in the American Rescue Plan making it easier for states to expand post-partum Medicaid coverage to 12 months, and recently approving Illinois' waiver to extend postpartum coverage.

In the next 100 days, the Administration should work to make this coverage permanent, required, and matched at 100 percent federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) in Medicaid, as recommended by the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission.

Mental Health

In the first 100 days, the Biden-Harris Administration invested in mental health resources by designating funding for children's mental health through the American Rescue Plan. The ARP provided \$10 million for

the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, \$30 million for Project AWARE, \$20 million for youth suicide prevent, and \$80 million for Pediatric Mental Health Care Access.

In the next 100 days, we hope the Administration works to further address the mental health crisis children are currently experiencing. This must be done by supporting the provision of school-based mental health services including with dedicated funding from the ARP, through support for pediatric mental health professionals via programs such as the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program, by supporting early identification and intervention through addressing behavioral health and primary care together, and by continuing to mitigate underlying factors that can contribute to mental health problems in children including poverty, racism, and gaps in health coverage.

Environmental Health

In the first 100 days, President Biden signed several executive orders to address the climate crisis. He also hosted a Leaders Summit on Climate, where he ambitiously committed the United States to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2030, and brought much-needed attention to the issue of climate change. We applaud the Administration for dedicating \$45 billion to replace the over 6 million lead pipes and service lines throughout the country. This will greatly reduce childhood lead exposure in schools, homes, and child care facilities.

In the next 100 days, the Administration should work on prioritizing children's health within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) by funding the important Children's Environmental Health Program. The Administration should also work on strengthening lead regulations to prevent this toxic chemical from impacting the health and development of children.

Tobacco

In the first 100 days, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) shared they will propose a rule to prohibit the sale of menthol cigarettes. Menthol makes cigarettes more addictive, easier for youth to start smoking, and harder for smokers to quit. Menthol has also had a disproportionate and negative impact on the health Black Americans.

In the next 100 days, the Administration should encourage the FDA to issue regulation creating a tobacco product standard that prohibits all flavored tobacco products, including all flavored e-cigarettes. The use of e-cigarettes by youth has escalated rapidly in recent years fueled by youth attraction to flavored products, placing a new generation at risk of nicotine addiction and tobacco use.

Early Learning and Child Care

In the first 100 days, the Biden-Harris Administration provided much needed support to child care facilities that were hurt during the pandemic. The ARP provided \$39 billion in emergency COVID-19 funding for child care. The Administration continued to invest in early learning and child care by proposing additional support through the American Jobs Plan and the American Families Plan. The American Jobs Plan offers \$25 billion in infrastructure funding for child care, and the American Families Plan includes \$225 billion to expand access to child care for 0-5 year olds, as well as \$200 billion to provide universal pre-K for all 3 and 4 year olds. The plan seeks to improve the quality of care by investing in curriculum development, smaller classes, and professional development and increased wages for teachers.

In the next 100 days, the Administration should continue to build support for the historic and necessary early learning and child care funding outlined in the American Families Plan, and expand these plans to cover all children 0-13 years of age. We also ask that the Administration supports early learning and child care by reestablishing the Office of Early Childhood Development between HHS, the Department of Education, and

other relevant agencies, and increasing staffing of the Office of Child Care, the Office of Head Start, and the Office of Early Childhood Development.

Education

In the first 100 days, the Biden-Harris Administration has taken crucial measures to help K-12 public schools in the face of revenue lost during the pandemic, in addition to long standing deficiencies. The American Rescue Plan infused \$123 billion of much needed support into K-12 schools. President Biden's American Jobs Plan would allocate \$100 billion in grants and bonds to modernize the infrastructure of our public schools. An executive order signed on March 8th took effort to protect those in educational environments, strengthening Title IX and its protection against discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs. The American Families Plan also includes important investments in education and teachers.

In the next 100 days, we hope the Administration will push to get the American Jobs and American Families Plans enacted, continue to pursue equity, supporting equal access and quality of education for children regardless of race, ability, and documentation status, while opposing privatization and charter movements and reducing the use of standardized testing.

Nutrition

In the first 100 days, the Biden-Harris Administration has done a great deal to address the growing number of hungry children. The Administration extended the 15% increase to maximum SNAP benefits to September 2021, getting much needed benefits to the lowest income families that were already receiving the maximum amount. They also increased the Pandemic-EBT benefits by 15% and expanded the Pandemic-EBT program through the summer, which will help feed over 30 million school children and provide much needed benefits during a time when childhood hunger is especially high. The Administration also extended waivers which make it easier for schools to feed children during the pandemic. Such waivers include allowing schools to serve free meals to all students, regardless of income, and providing schools with flexibility in when and how they serve meals to students.

In the next 100 days and beyond, the Biden-Harris Administration should continue to invest and improve the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to increase enrollment and make all children permanently eligible for healthy, free school meals.

Child Welfare

In the first 100 days, two actions taken by the Administration to address child welfare are equally notable. The speedy appointment of Aysha Schromburg to the helm of the Children's Bureau was an accomplishment that promotes the best interest of children and youth in foster care because of her clear commitment to prevention, protection, and equity and her issuing of a Program Instruction necessary for the implementation of the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act.

Secondly, by expanding the EITC for former foster youth who are at least 18 years old, the Administration is promoting economic stability for youth who have been in the government's care.

In the next 100 days, we hope to see administrative actions that address equity. Specifically the Administration could promote equity by withdrawing the HHS no discrimination waiver to South Carolina, issuing an executive order that bans states and county child welfare agencies who are receiving federal funds from contracting with organizations that discriminate against LGBTQ+ adults who seek to become foster parents, restore the 2016 final rule on the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and require data collection on Native and LGBTQ youth in foster care. We also hope to see from

the Administration an acknowledgment of the historic and ongoing racism that has contributed to the racial disproportionality that persists at every stage in the child welfare system.

Homelessness

In the first 100 days, The ARP's \$123 billion for K-12 education included \$800 million in dedicated funding for children and youth experiencing homelessness. Allocated for identifying, enrolling, and supporting children and youth in attending school, as well as wrap-around services, this is, as Schoolhouse Connection reports, more funding for the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness than over the last ten years, combined. The ARP also alters provisions of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), allowing childless homeless young adults to access support at the age of 18 as compared to 25 old previously.

In the next 100 days, we call on President Biden and the Administration to institute further support so that no child or youth is homeless, including supporting the Homeless Children and Youth Act (HCYA) to remove barriers to assistance for homeless children and families.

Paid Leave

In the first 100 days, the Administration introduced The American Families Act proposal which calls for \$225 billion to guarantee 12 weeks of paid parental, family and personal illness/safety leave, including offering workers three days of bereavement leave.

In the next 100 days, the Administration should help secure the passage of a national paid family and medical leave program to support the millions of parents in the United States who are left with the impossible choice of staying home to care for their children and families or losing necessary income.

Youth Justice

In the first 100 days, the Biden-Harris Administration's ARP benefited, and continues to benefit, teens and young people who are in detention centers, jails, prisons or other secure settings by providing funding for COVID-19 testing, vaccinations, mitigation measures, and safe reentry to the community.

In the next 100 days, youth justice requires more attention from the Administration as racial disproportionalities amongst youth who are detained have worsened during the pandemic. A successful next 100 days would include the appointment of a strong leader to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) who is committed to eliminating juvenile incarceration (especially during the pandemic) and providing emotional and mental health supports to youth and their families as a response to delinquent behaviors and the reinstatement of the Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) data collection requirements, trainings, manuals and technical assistance that were waived by the prior Administration.

Immigration

In the first 100 days, the Biden-Harris Administration has ended harmful Trump-era policies like the Remain in Mexico program, the information-sharing agreement between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and HHS, and the public charge rule. It has also created a task force to reunify separated families, restarted the Central American Minors Program, and taken steps to reformat Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The Administration also introduced a long-awaited immigration reform bill that, for the first time, would require border policies based on the "best interest of the child."

In the next 100 days, we hope the Administration will end Title 42 and restore a fair asylum process. That must include steps to protect Black immigrant families and children, who have been disproportionately

impacted by harmful immigration policies. We also hope the Administration will transform the care of unaccompanied children and work with Congress to pass a pathway to citizenship.

International Children's Issues

In the first 100 days, the Biden-Harris Administration signed an emergency relief package that included \$10.8 billion in International Affairs Budget resources for the global response to COVID-19. It will address areas such as global health, international disaster relief, economic assistance, and food insecurity that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Biden-Harris Administration also committed \$4 billion to COVAX for COVID vaccine procurement and distribution.

In the next 100 days, we hope the Administration will continue efforts to reverse the damage and losses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We ask the Administration to create a global vaccine rollout plan for children and youth. Then to address the secondary impacts of COVID-19 including education gaps, parental and caregiver loss, and gender based violence (especially for girls).

Coordination of Federal Programs and Services for Children

In the first 100 days, the Biden-Harris Administration overturned a number of executive orders and directives from the Trump era that had a negative impact on our nation's children, as noted above. The Administration also issued a Modernize Regulatory Review directive to all federal agencies asking them to review and make recommendations to improve the regulatory review process to "promote public health and safety, economic growth, social welfare, racial justice, environmental stewardship, human dignity, equity, and the interests of future generations."

In the next 100 days, we urge the Administration to improve executive branch review and coordination of all federal programs that impact our nation's children across federal agencies. We ask the Administration to consider establishing the following: a White House Office on Children and Youth; a Children's Cabinet led by Vice President Harris; children as a cross-agency priority (CAP) in the federal agencies via a directive from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB); an interagency working group out of HHS to better coordinate child health, early childhood, and poverty reduction efforts; and, a Youth Advisory Council.

Working Together for Children and Families

As President Biden said in his book *Promises to Keep: On Life and Politics*:

It's time for a president to stand up and remind the American people that we have promises to keep—promises to the world, promises to one another, promises to our children and to our grandchildren. In rededicating ourselves to the hard work of fulfilling those promises, we restore America as the hope of the world and the vision of a brighter future.

We are grateful for the undeniable improvements made and tone set by the Administration within the first 100 days, but we have many miles to go in order to meet the needs of children and families. We believe that in order to succeed in addressing these issues, it will take coordination amongst advocates, care providers, and government bodies. Our team is eager to serve as a resource and partner in working to address the needs of children throughout your Administration.

The fact is that every policy issue is a children's issue. As Vice President Harris said:

Every action we make has a profound impact on our children and their future. It's vital we think about them when making decisions.

First Focus on Children is a member of over 40 national coalitions and leads the two biggest major cross-cutting coalitions on children's issues – the Children's Budget Coalition and the Child Poverty Action Group – in the country. We stand ready to work with the Administration in any way that we can and have been pleased to meet with OMB on two occasions and will repeat our offer to help coordinate meetings of the child advocacy community with the Domestic Policy Council (DPC) and Office of Public Engagement (OPE), just as we did during the Obama-Biden Administration.

Congratulations on a successful 100 days. We look forward to all the victories for children that we will achieve together in the days to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bruce Lesley
President