June 21, 2022

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

The undersigned child advocacy organizations write to thank you for the work you have done to advance children’s best interests within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), including facilitating the reunification of children forcibly separated from parents under the previous Administration, and to applaud President Biden for recently signing into law H.R. 4426, “Homeland Security for Children Act.” We believe there is much more DHS can do to prioritize children in its policies and urge you to swiftly act to implement this bill by adopting child impact statements for department policies and designating high-level leadership on children’s issues within the agency.

Every issue is a kids’ issue, and homeland security is no exception. DHS has authorization over a wide range of issues, from disaster management to immigration to terrorism. All these issues impact children. Children are disproportionately impacted by natural disasters, whether they face physical injury, are cut off from food or medical care, face school disruption, or experience declines in mental health. In immigration, children and families make up a larger share of those arriving at our border seeking protection and the agency’s enforcement policies have consequences for children in immigrant families. Children are also impacted by terrorist attacks—for example, after the September 11 attacks, 35 percent of parents reported that their children had at least one stress symptom, and almost half reported that their children were worried about their safety or the safety of their family. The global phenomena of increased natural disasters and forced migration, as well as recent domestic terrorism attacks in the United States, make this bill’s enactment particularly timely.

The Homeland Security for Children Act requires each DHS office and component to take the needs of children into account in mission planning and execution, particularly for children in underserved communities. It also directs the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to integrate the needs of children in disaster planning, including by appointing a technical expert to coordinate such integration. To effectively fulfill the agency’s new mandate to take children’s needs into account across all components, we urge that DHS adopt the use of child impact statements.
Similar to analyses the federal government currently uses, child impact statements are a tool to systematically ask fundamental questions about a policy, program, or activity’s outcome on children’s best interests. Using child impact statements, DHS can put in place an intentional and systematic structure to place children’s rights, views, and needs in the foreground of its policies and plans. Additionally, child impact statements advance both the bill’s mandate and the Administration’s whole-of-government approach to advance equity and support underserved communities. Children are now the nation’s most diverse generation and a dedicated process to evaluate policies’ impact on children will illuminate disproportionate negative impacts or additional steps needed to equitably advance the needs of children from marginalized communities, including Black, Brown, and Indigenous children, children with disabilities, children of immigrants, and LGBTQ youth.

We also urge you to appoint a coordinator on children’s issues within your office, as well as within FEMA. This will promote coordination across DHS to prioritize children and also facilitate DHS’s coordination with other agencies to address the holistic and intersectional needs of children.

Thank you for your ongoing work to prioritize children. We are excited for this opportunity for DHS to lead by example and prioritize children through the use of child impact statements and high-level leadership for children within the agency. We look forward to working with you and being part of regular stakeholder meetings to support the agency’s consideration of children’s best interests, in line with the consultation provisions of the bill.

Sincerely,

Center for Law and Social Policy
ChildFund
Child Labor Coalition
Church World Service
Comic Relief US
CREA
Fair Start Movement
First Focus on Children
FLAP-Farmworker and Landscaper Advocacy Project
iFoster
Justice for Migrant Women
Juvenile Law Center
Kids Impact Initiative
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
MCCOY (Marion County Commission on Youth, Inc.)
Media Voices for Children
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Consumers League
National Migrant Seasonal Head Start Association
Phoenix Zones Initiatives
Population Balance
Save the Children
Sycamores
Texas Kids Can't Wait
The Children's Partnership
UNICEF USA
Voices for Utah Children
Voices for Vermont's Children
Witness at the Border
ZERO TO THREE