



# *The Kid Angle*

*Kid-focused news from First Focus on Children*

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## **Budget package contains some highlights for kids**

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### ***But fails to prioritize children in many ways***

Congress is considering a sweeping FY 2023 federal spending bill that includes several important investments in children but also misses some opportunities. Despite the dogged efforts of several Champions for Children who worked hard to make children a top priority, the legislative package, in its current form, will leave some critical work for the nation's children unfinished for the 118th Congress, including passing an enhanced Child Tax Credit and providing accommodations for DACA and Dreamers.

#### **Highlights include:**

**Children's Health Care:** The omnibus requires states to provide [12-month continuous eligibility](#) for children in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) **AND extends CHIP by two years**, pushing its expiration to 2029. This is good news, but not good enough. Over the last 25 years, CHIP has helped reduce the uninsurance rate among children by more than 60% yet [it remains the only federal insurance program without permanent funding. Congress needs to change that, ASAP.](#)

Lawmakers also gave mental health some of the consideration it demands, including a \$390 million increase in funding for the [new 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline to a half-billion dollars](#), and roughly \$50 million in other increases for children's mental health programs.

**Child Care:** The omnibus contains a 30% funding increase for child care and early learning to \$8 billion. That amount is not nearly enough to meet the [challenges facing this critical piece of economic infrastructure](#), but it is a welcome down payment to address the needs of children, families, the child care workforce, and employers. Early Head Start/Head Start will get a roughly one-billion-dollar increase to \$12 billion.

**Nutrition:** Lawmakers applied a Peter-to-Paul strategy on feeding children, creating a permanent summer debit card program worth \$40 million that will provide low-income families with a \$40 grocery benefit per child per month, but paying for it by reducing pandemic-era food assistance. [Children still very much need these emergency benefits](#) in the face of continued inflation and rising food costs.

**Maternal and Infant Care:** The omnibus expands the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant by just under 10% to \$823 million and supports mental health initiatives with \$50 million for the maternal mental health hotline operated by the Health Resources and Services Administration and creation of a task force on maternal mental health (language

courtesy of bipartisan bills from [Champion for Children Rep. Nanette Barragan \(H.R. 4217\)](#) and [Defender Sen. Maggie Hassan \(S. 2779\)](#)).

**Reauthorization of Home Visiting:** The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program provides [critical home visiting services to young families that improve the health, economic stability, school readiness, and overall well-being of the children](#) and families it serves. The omnibus prevents MIECHV from expiring with a five-year reauthorization, provides the first-ever funding increase in over a decade, doubles the tribal set-aside, allows the continuation of virtual home visiting, requires new data collection disaggregated by race and ethnicity, and gives new support to the home visiting workforce.

**Coordination for children:** We have a real soft spot for lawmakers' creation of — and \$3 million funding for — a Children's Interagency Coordinating Council, a body to be housed at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that will coordinate efforts across the dozens of agencies that affect children's well-being. [First Focus on Children and over 80 other organizations urged HHS Secretary Becerra to establish the council in a letter earlier this year.](#) One of the Council's first assigned tasks is to contract with the National Academy of Sciences for an analysis of federal policies that affect child poverty, a bold follow-up to the [Academy's 2019 report](#) and an important step to capture lessons learned from pandemic-era policies such as [the expanded Child Tax Credit](#), especially in the face of its demise during the budget negotiations.



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