



The Kid Angle

Kid-focused news from First Focus on Children

Symbolism stole the show at SOTU. Now kids need action.

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Symbolism can be powerful. It was great to see so many members of Congress wearing pins at SOTU that support children (and not a single lapel-sized assault weapon). That Crayola calling for child care stole the night. And we were positively giddy about having perennial [**Champion for Children Rep. Danny Davis sport his #Commit2Kids button.**](#)



**The only thing more powerful than symbolism is action.
And that's what has to come next.**

President Biden struck a bipartisan note in his address and called on Congress to **restore the full Child Tax Credit, establish a national policy of paid family and medical leave, and create affordable child care**. He pledged **greater access to mental health care for our nation's children and youth**, and pushed lawmakers to **cap the price of insulin** for all Americans, including the 200,000 young people with Type 1 diabetes who need it to survive.

Luckily, paths of action already exist for several of these goals. With each new Congress, the [First Focus on Children policy team](#) combs through unfinished business to see what progress can be saved and applied going forward. **In our upcoming Children's Agenda for the 118th Congress, we identify several pieces of viable legislation — some of them bipartisan — that could get us where our kids need us to go.**

Restore the full Child Tax Credit: Congress should convert the CTC into a permanent, monthly child allowance to ensure all families — including residents of U.S. territories and all immigrant children — can weather economic challenges and the growing cost of raising healthy children. The expanded Child Tax Credit included in the American Rescue Plan — which cut child poverty in half and brought it to record lows — was designed around the **American Family Act** (H.R. 928). The legislation, sponsored by Reps. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Suzan DelBene (D-WA) and Richie Torres (D-NJ) in the 117th and Sens. Michael Bennet (D-CO), Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) in the 116th, continues to provide an excellent blueprint.

Establish a national paid leave policy: During COVID, Congress passed temporary paid sick and paid family and medical leave that required some employers to offer paid leave so employees impacted by COVID could care for themselves or their children — even children who were home because the pandemic had closed their school or child care center. Families' need for paid sick days and paid family and medical leave won't end with the Public Health Emergency. Congress should establish permanent programs as proposed in the **FAMILY Act** (H.R. 804/S. 248), led by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) in the 117th, and the sick leave provisions in the **Healthy Families Act** (H.R. 2465/S. 1195), again led by Rep. DeLauro (D-CT) this time with Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA).

Create affordable, high-quality child care: The **Child Care for Working Families Act** (S. 1360/H.R. 2817), from Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) in the 117th, would limit families' out-of-pocket child care costs; expand pre-K programs in states; improve care options for children with disabilities, dual language learners, children experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care; ensure that child care workers' pay is commensurate with that of public elementary school teachers; and increase Head Start funding. The **Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act** (S. 1398/H.R. 2886), from Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Rep. Mondaire Jones (D-NY) also in the 117th, would give every family access to child care; provide free child care for families under 200% of the federal poverty limit, and limit other families to paying 7% of their income. The bill also would provide pre-K and expand Head Start. Congress significantly boosted child care funding in the FY 2023 spending bill, but these structural changes must also be implemented to save the child care system.

Ensure greater access to mental health care: Children's mental health care is broken partly because the pediatric health care system as a whole is broken. Congress must — is there a stronger word? — must hold hearings as soon as possible to assess the problems plaguing the pediatric health care system and recommend immediate and long-term solutions. **On mental health care specifically**, modest inroads came from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, but a comprehensive **pediatric behavioral health system requires significant progress on** workforce development, parity, and payment, and thorough integration with children's overall health care. **The bipartisan Children's Mental Health Care Access Act** (S. 3864/H.R. 7076) allows health care providers to work across sectors **to connect children, teens and young adults with behavioral health services**. The bill, introduced by Sens. Chris Murphy (D-CT) and Bill Cassidy (R-LA) in the 117th, and sponsored by Reps. Kim Schrier (D-WA) and Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA) in the House, continues pediatric mental health care access grants through 2027 and promotes integrating behavioral health into pediatric primary care, offering **an excellent outline for working across the aisle to serve children**.

Cap the price of insulin for all Americans: Congress must pass the **Affordable Insulin Now Act** (S.3700), sponsored by Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA) in the 117th, which would cap insulin prices at \$35 a month for all children, just as the Reconciliation bill capped insulin prices for adults. **And why stop at insulin?** Congress could lower the cost of even more prescription drugs for children with the **bipartisan Fair Drug Prices for Kids Act** (S. 2531/H.R. 5576), **which would allow states to extend the Medicaid drug rebate program** to the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The bill, sponsored in the 117th by Sens. Mark Warner (D-VA) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Reps. Susan Wild (D-PA) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-NY) would offer children enrolled in a state CHIP program the lowest possible prescription prices.

As Tuesday's heckling made clear, the battle to cut entitlements is on, and it's one that children traditionally have lost.

During his address, President Biden asked the room to stand up for seniors. They did, and that's great. We'd like to see them do the same for kids.





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