

July 30, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Charles Schumer
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
U.S. House of Representatives

Re: COVID-19 Federal Response Negotiations

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

During a time when our nation continues to face a pandemic and an economic recession— both of which exacerbate pre-existing inequities— we at Children's HealthWatch call upon our country's leaders to implement comprehensive policy interventions necessary for the financial stability and health of families of young children with low incomes. As a network of pediatricians and public health researchers with over two decades of experience documenting the effect of economic conditions and policy changes on the health and cognitive development of infants and toddlers and their families, we know it is critical for the health and well-being of our nation to implement policies that provide sustainable resources to ensure all families are able to meet basic needs.¹

Young children are particularly vulnerable to recessions. Economic distress has immediate and direct effects on the health, growth, and development of infants and toddlers often well before outcomes are documented in the broader population and these effects persist well after the economy as a whole recovers.² Our research and that of others overwhelmingly demonstrates that when families are unable to afford basic needs, the health and well-being of young children and their families suffers.^{3,4,5,6} We have also shown that improvements and expansions to federal programs that mitigate financial hardships, especially in times of crisis, including nutrition assistance, affordable housing, refundable tax credits, utility assistance, health care coverage, and quality, affordable child care supports the health of children and their families particularly during times of economic crisis.^{7,8,9,10}

Millions of people across the country have lost work or income as a result of the pandemic, which has led to unprecedented spikes in reports of food insecurity – inadequate access to enough food for all household members to lead active, healthy lives - and difficulty affording housing.^{11,12}

Given the direct effect these hardships have on health, we implore Congress to include robust measures necessary in the next COVID-19 response package that mitigate these economic hardships. These measures must seek to meet immediate needs of families during this crisis and include longer-term measures that recognize families with low incomes recover more slowly from economic downturns than those with higher incomes and assets.¹³

Based on this evidence, following policy improvements are imperative and must be passed in a relief package by Congress before August recess:

- **Issuing direct cash transfers** until the economy recovers that are inclusive of immigrants and mixed status families and provide equal or higher payments for children recognizing that families with children – particularly those with young children – are at greater risk of poverty than other households without children.¹⁴
- **Expand the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)** to provide longer-term support for families and ensure they are able to meet basic needs over an extended period of time. Key changes to the refundable credits include: (1) making the CTC fully refundable; (2) boosting CTC amounts and creating an expanded credit for families with young children; (3) increasing EITC amounts for workers not raising children and extending the age eligibility from 19-66.
- **Increasing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits** by at least 15% for all participants, as was done during the Great Recession, until the economy recovers to adequately meet the nutritional needs of families with low-incomes and reduce food insecurity.¹⁵ SNAP is a counter-cyclical program designed to respond to disasters and economic downturns. During the Great Recession the benefit boost for all participants effectively reduced food insecurity across the country and improved the health of young children and families.^{16,17} In addition to boosting benefits, Congress must suspend all SNAP administrative rules that would terminate or weaken benefits.
- **Establishing an Emergency Rental Assistance fund** to provide rapid response funding for families with rent or utility arrearages and ensure families are not at risk of eviction or utility shutoffs as a result of the economic crisis. Research indicates more than \$100 billion of funding is necessary to meet the needs of renters during this crisis.¹⁸
- **Implementing a nationwide moratorium on all evictions and foreclosures** during and immediately following the national emergency. This will not only protect public health by closing housing courts, which are often crowded, but also keep families in their homes in order to avoid families needing to double up or access homeless shelters, both of which place people further at risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- **Providing robust resources for child care** to ensure essential employees are able to access child care, support the child care workforce struggling as a result of closures, and keep all child care providers afloat during closures to ensure families maintain access to child care following the pandemic. Analyses show at least \$50 billion are urgently needed for child care relief.¹⁹
- **Expanding access to affordable and adequate health insurance** options so all families, including children and adults regardless of immigration status, are able to access medical care, prescriptions, and vaccines when they need them without having to sacrifice other basic needs is critical during this national public health crisis as well as between epidemics.²⁰

As those who care for the health of America’s children, we understand the vitally important role public policies and programs play for the health of children, particularly the youngest. These solutions are evidence-based responses to this crisis and we urge you to include them in the final COVID-19 response package.

Sincerely,



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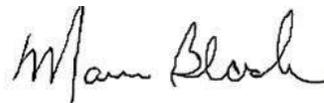
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