

September 15, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Bldg.  
200 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

On behalf of organizations working to improve the lives of children, we are writing to thank you for your leadership and urge you, without delay, to establish a children's interagency coordinating council, housed in the Office of the Secretary, Health and Human Services (HHS).

Due to the leadership of Representatives Lucille Roybal-Allard and Barbara Lee, language was included in both the House and Senate FY 2022 Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bills' accompanying reports (H.R. 4502/S. 3062) directing the HHS Office of the Secretary to create a children's interagency coordinating council and "foster greater coordination, collaboration, and transparency on child policy across agency lines." The committees also acknowledge the disproportionately negative impact of COVID-19 on children in communities of color and direct the council to "examine and periodically report on a broad array of comprehensive and cross-cutting issues affecting child well-being."

Furthermore, we are excited to see a second year of support for the council in both the House Appropriations Committee-passed FY 2023 Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill's accompanying report (H.R. 8295) and the Senate-released FY 2023 Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill accompanying report, which also includes \$3 million for HHS to establish the council.

[During your testimony this past March](#) at the House appropriations subcommittee hearing on the President's FY 2023 request for HHS, Rep. Lee asked you about the council. We were very pleased to hear you respond that HHS is moving forward to put the infrastructure in place to make the council happen, and that you are anxious to get it going.

As HHS takes steps to establish this council, our organizations ask specifically that:

- The council be established within the Office of the HHS Secretary, and HHS should issue a press release to mark the official launch of the Council with the goal of making a public announcement on or before September 30, 2022.

- Council meetings and activities should include regular participation from senior staff in the Office of the Secretary, as well as any other relevant staff designees, from within the following agencies:
  - U.S. Department of Education
  - U.S. Department of Agriculture
  - U.S. Department of Treasury
  - U.S. Department of Homeland Security
  - U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
  - U.S. Department of Commerce
  - U.S. Department of Labor
  - U.S. Department of Energy
  - U.S. Department of State
  - U.S. Department of Justice
  - U.S. Department of the Interior
  - U.S. Agency for International Development
  - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
  - Other relevant federal agencies.
  
- The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) within HHS issue annual reports on the activity of the council. These reports should include a description of the actions taken by agencies to reduce child poverty and the racial poverty gap, starting with the first report to be completed by September 30, 2023. To the extent feasible, ASPE should collaborate with the National Academy of Sciences in developing the report.
  
- The council establish an advisory group of children’s advocates to inform its work as well as hold periodic listening sessions to receive input from children’s advocates and young people on the federal, state, and local level.
  
- Council activity cover both domestic and international agency work impacting children.
  
- Rep. Barbara Lee, Chair of the Majority Leader Hoyer Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity and senior member of the House Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, or other leading stakeholders be invited to at least one council meeting annually.

Our children are currently facing some of the most challenging times seen in our history. They deserve our greatest efforts and best thinking, which cannot happen if we are working in silos. The public supports cross-cutting efforts on children — [in a recent poll conducted by Lake Research Partners](#), voters overwhelmingly (82 to 13 percent) felt that programs for children need greater attention and coordination across our federal, state, and local governments.

A children's interagency coordinating council housed in the Office of the HHS Secretary will create a permanent and ongoing mechanism to improve both domestic and international policymaking for children. The council should place particular emphasis on reducing racial and ethnic disparities in outcomes for children. At home, we encourage the council to prioritize reducing disparities facing Hispanic, African American, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native families as well as prioritize the needs of vulnerable children who face physical and economic challenges to thrive. Around the world, discrimination and disparities may vary but we encourage the council to utilize a context-specific intersectional lens that looks at the impacts of gender, disability, racial and ethnic minority status as well as socioeconomic factors on a child's well-being.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to working with you on this and other efforts to improve the lives of our children.

Sincerely,

First Focus on Children

AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families

Amal Alliance

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

The Arc of the United States

Association of Children's Residential & Community Services (ACRC)

Autism Society of America

Be A Hero

Bethany Christian Services

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

ChildFund International

Child Labor Coalition

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)

Children's Advocacy Institute

Children's Aid

Children's Defense Fund

Children's Health Fund

Children's Home Society of America

Children's Rights Inc

The Children's Partnership

Church World Service

Coalition for Juvenile Justice

Congressional Research Institute for Social Work Policy (CRISP)

Council for Professional Recognition

Culture Creations

Education for All Coalition

Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation

Family Centered Treatment Foundation  
Family Focused Treatment Association  
Farmworker Justice  
FLAP-Farmworker and Landscaper Advocacy Project  
Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project  
Forum for Youth Investment  
Global Campaign for Education-US  
Healthy Teen Network  
Heartland Alliance International  
Institute for Educational Leadership  
International Rescue Committee  
ISS-USA  
Keep Kids Safe  
Kids Impact Initiative  
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)  
MENTOR National  
MomsRising  
Monique Burr Foundation  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement  
National Association of Counsel for Children  
National Association of Counties (NACo)  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of School Nurses  
National Child Care Association  
National Diaper Bank Network  
National Head Start Association  
The National Homelessness Law Center  
National Immigration Law Center  
National Juvenile Justice Network  
National Migrant & Seasonal Head Start Association  
National Network for Youth  
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence  
National WIC Association  
National Women's Law Center  
Nemours Children's Health  
OMEP-USA  
ParentsTogether Action  
Partnership for America's Children  
Phoenix Zones Initiative  
Prevent Blindness  
Prevent Child Abuse America  
Prevention Institute

Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)  
Save the Children  
School-Based Health Alliance  
SchoolHouse Connection  
Strategies for Youth  
Together for Girls  
UnidosUS  
Witness at the Border  
Women's Refugee Commission  
UNICEF USA  
Voice for Adoption  
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights  
Youth Villages  
ZERO TO THREE