

February 23, 2023

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 to follow up on our [September 15th letter](#) to urge you, without delay, to establish a children's interagency coordinating council, housed in the Office of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Due to the leadership of Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), former Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA), and champions in the House and Senate Appropriations Committee, language directing HHS to create this council was included in the FY 2023 omnibus spending bill passed by Congress at the end of last year, and included \$3 million to fund its establishment:

“Children's Interagency Coordinating Council - The agreement includes \$3,000,000 for the Children's Interagency Coordinating Council to foster greater coordination and transparency on child policy across agencies. The Council shall enter into agreement with NASEM to prepare a report to Congress analyzing federal policies that have affected child poverty. The study should rely on the U.S. Census Bureau Supplemental Poverty Measure, among other sources of information. The Council will also examine and periodically report on a broad array of cross-cutting issues affecting child well-being.”

We appreciate your recent response to our September letter, and we want to follow-up to say that as you take steps to establish this council, we recommend:

- You permanently maintain the council within the Office of the HHS Secretary, and have HHS issue a press release early this year to mark the official launch of the Council.
- You name an Executive Director from within HHS to lead this council.
- You require senior staff from the Secretary's office of each participating agency to participate in the council. We suggest that HHS and each participating agency designate

and staff a permanent Office of Children that can collaborate with the council as well as facilitate coordination on children's issues 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. Department of Defense
 - U.S. Agency for International Development
 - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
 - Other relevant federal agencies.
- The council should meet at least quarterly.
 - Council activity should cover both domestic and international agency work impacting a broad array of issues affecting child well-being.
 - HHS should start coordination with the National Academy of Sciences without delay to prepare a report to Congress to analyze the impact of federal policies on child poverty and the racial poverty gap.
 - The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) within HHS should conduct annual public reporting of activity of the council.
 - The council should 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.

The reverberations of the pandemic continue for our nation's children. From an escalating mental health crisis among children and adolescents to widespread learning loss among students to the disproportionate impact of inflation and supply chain issues for households with children in affording and locating basic necessities. These problems are multi-faceted, and solutions to them require cross-collaboration among decision makers.

We thank you for your commitment to our nation's children and we look forward to working with you on this and other efforts to improve the lives of our children.

Sincerely,

First Focus on Children

Amal Alliance

The Arc of the United States

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

Autism Society of America

Bank Information Center

Bethany Christian Services

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Center for Reflection, Education and Action, Inc. (CREA)

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 HealthWatch

Children's Home Society of America

Children's Rights Inc

The Children's Partnership

Church World Service

Coalition for Juvenile Justice

Committee for Children

Congressional Research Institute for Social Work Policy (CRISP)

Council for Professional Recognition

Culture Creations

Education for All Coalition

Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation

Families USA

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
Free the Slaves
Futures Without Violence
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)
Mental Health America
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 for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Nurses
National Child Care Association
National Consumers League
National Diaper Bank Network
National Head Start Association
The National Homelessness Law Center
National Immigration Law Center
National Juvenile Justice Network
National Network for Youth
National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
National WIC Association
National Women's Law Center
Nemours Children's Health
Organizations Concerned About Rural Education (OCRE)
OMEP-USA
ParentsTogether Action

Partners for our Children
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
Share our Strength
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