

[LOGO]

Date

The Honorable Bob Casey, Jr., U.S. Senator

The Honorable Pat Toomey, U.S. Senator

Re: Support for the House-passed Build Back Better Act

Dear Senators Casey and Toomey,

We are writing to you as a coalition of state advocates, practitioners, policy experts, and stakeholders committed to the well-being of children, young adults, and families.

We write to urge you to work to pass the Build Back Better Act (BBBA) promptly and to prioritize the child-centered investments – both in scope and duration – that were included in the House-passed bill, **particularly the Child Tax Credit expansion which will otherwise expire at the end of 2021.**

The investments that are included in the House bill, programs that our organizations have fought to enhance for many decades, have the collective potential to be the most transformative investments for children and families in decades. Some of the most promising investments in the Build Back Better Act include:

- the extension of enhancements to the Child Tax Credit for another year and making it permanently refundable,
- providing access to child care for young children with a cap on parents' expenditure of 7% of their income,
- universal prekindergarten,
- expansions in child nutrition,
- making the Children's Health Insurance Program permanent,
- housing subsidies that will protect children from homelessness, and
- four weeks of paid family leave.

They have the potential to enhance thousands of Pennsylvania's children's health, wellbeing, growth, and upward mobility for generations.

The BBBA provides a fully paid investment that will make children and families healthier, better educated, and more financially stable.

We urge you to support quick passage to ensure that there is no lapse in providing the monthly Child Tax Credit payments and to move quickly to support our state's families and economy.

**The BBBA will help families afford quality child care and preschool for their children.**

The BBBA makes sure that families pay no more than 7% of their income on child care for children under six if they make less than 2.5 times Pennsylvania's median income, or \$241,946 for a family of 4. That will provide about 710,000 young children in Pennsylvania with quality care per year, or about 9 out of 10 young children. For example, a family of four, with two young children, earning approximately \$96,778, the median income in the state, will pay no more than \$565 per month in child care for young children. About 17% of preschool-age children in Pennsylvania currently have access to publicly funded pre-k; universal pre-kindergarten will allow 199,580 more 3- and 4-year-old children to have quality education.

**The BBBA will ensure children and families have better access to food.**

Approximately, 15% of children in Pennsylvania live in food insecure households. This plan will expand free school meals to about 251,000 more students throughout the school year as well as provide 947,153 student's families with funds to purchase food throughout the summer so they have access to food all year.

**The BBBA will offer stable and affordable housing options for families.**

We know rental assistance and access to homeownership is essential to the stability of children during such a pivotal time in their life. However, in Pennsylvania 720,000 renters spend more than 30% of their income on rent, making it even harder for families that are already stretched to afford other essentials such as food and transportation. The housing voucher in the BBBA alone will benefit 11,800 households in Pennsylvania, or about 24,400 residents. It will provide about 9,300 children with a stable place to grow and develop.

**The BBBA will improve Pennsylvania access to affordable health care.**

There are approximately 122,000 uninsured Pennsylvanians. Nationally, the BBBA would provide over four million more people with free or low-cost health insurance through the health exchanges for the next four years. Children need healthy parents and caregivers to thrive; health insurance allows adults to work and protects family incomes.

**The BBBA will support families struggling to make ends meet and cut child poverty in half.**

Before the pandemic, 13% of Pennsylvania children under 18 lived in poverty. The expansion of the child tax credit in 2021 has been the largest one-year reduction in child poverty in history. The BBBA would extend monthly payments of \$250 for children under 18 and \$300 for children under six for another year, benefiting 2,363,000 Pennsylvania children. In Pennsylvania, at least 57% of households spent the most recent credit on necessities such as food, clothing, school-related items or services, and other household essentials. In the long run, we know that when families with incomes under \$25,000 get tax credits like this, children are healthier, have a better chance of excelling in school, graduating from high school and college, and earning more in adulthood.

Even after 2022, families with little or no earned income will continue to be able to claim the Child Tax Credit. This includes caregivers that have lost their jobs, receive disability payments, or are retired and raising young relatives. The financial stability of so many families raising children must not be negotiated – especially those families who have been excluded from the Child Tax Credit as a result of earning too little. These are the children who will benefit most from the Child Tax Credit; this is where the Child Tax Credit can have the biggest results in reducing poverty. *The House-passed Child Tax Credit provision permitting permanent full refundability must remain in the BBBA.*

Furthermore, the bill will allow up to 675,000 undocumented children to benefit from the credit—restoring a benefit they lost in 2017. This improvement will bring about \$106 million to the state and give more flexibility to families to use the funds toward food, shelter, or other necessities. *We ask you to ensure that the final bill includes the House-passed bill restoring eligibility to children who have ITINs rather than social security numbers.*

As a coalition dedicated to furthering policies on all of the aspects that help children thrive, we emphatically support each of these bold investments. Families benefited from your support in previous pandemic relief packages, but the need for financial security was evident before the pandemic. For a family living slightly over, on, or under the federal poverty level, the stress and realistic consequences of one small financial set-back have innumerable repercussions that are endured by the whole family unit.

Passage of this plan will be a monumental win for children in Pennsylvania - the most important single piece of federal legislation for children and families in at least the last 50 years. It will provide the stability that children need to grow and thrive; it will provide support for families as they recover from the turmoil of the last year; and it will provide the tools needed to rebuild Pennsylvania. The Senate must pass it promptly.

We are grateful that the Build Back Better reconciliation bill has made the child-centered investments a priority. We thank you for that, on behalf of every child in Pennsylvania, and we ask that you now make sure the final bill is passed promptly and supports all these investments and particularly includes these Child Tax Credit and CHIP provisions. Please pass this bill before the Senate recesses in December, so that the Child Tax Credit payments can continue without interruption.

For any questions, please contact Donna Cooper, Children First Executive Director, at [donnac@childrenfirstpa.org](mailto:donnac@childrenfirstpa.org)

Sincerely,

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