

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/lift-up-americas-children/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

By Sandy Santana, Children's Rights & Bruce Lesley, First Focus Campaign for Children

Public discourse in this election year has largely ignored the plight of our nations children. Debates and position platforms have glossed over what the COVID-19 pandemic has meant for their stability and well-being. And despite a new [study released last week](#) finding that poverty has grown by six million people in the past three months, with circumstances worsening most for Black people and children, candidates and elected officials have remained largely silent.

Even as the virus has devastated the health and economic well-being of many of our communities, we've acted like children are immune not just to the virus itself, but to the emotional trauma and economic pressures that they and their families are facing. In fact, every aspect of the lives of children are being impacted. There should be no disagreement about prioritizing the health, safety, and well-being of every child. But long before this crisis, few of our nations leaders have chosen to put the needs and interests of children front and center. This is despite the fact that the United States has for a very long time been woefully behind other nations when it comes to child welfare.

The U.S. has one of the [highest rates of child poverty](#) among developed countries, and child poverty is 50 percent higher than adult poverty. [Infant mortality](#) is more common in the United States than in many other economically advanced nations. The United States spends a [smaller share of its GDP on benefits for children](#) than other wealthy nations do. The federal share of spending on children has dropped to 7.48% and by 9% since 2016, and a recent study projects that spending on programs and benefits for children will decline by more than [25 percent](#) over the next decade.

As long as children remain an afterthought in public policymaking, these problems will only get worse. As advocates for children, we've identified common sense measures that the next administration and Congress should prioritize, not just to lift up the vulnerable children who are struggling now, but to make investments that will keep kids safe and healthy from the start with no need for costly government interventions that too often do more harm than good. In the long run, improving economic and health outcomes for children can secure a brighter financial future for all of us.

First, we need to tackle child poverty. [More than ten million children](#) were living below poverty in 2019 and kids were more than 50% more likely to live in poverty even before the coronavirus pandemic and economic recession that have clearly increased this problem. We support implementing a child allowance to give a hand up to those who are dealing with the challenges of homeschooling, childcare, and keeping food on the table. The child tax credit must also be made fully accessible for low-income families who need it the most but are often not eligible. As many as [27 million children](#) who are in low-income households receive the smallest average tax credit because they earn *too little* under the current requirements.

Reducing child poverty will help children in low-income families stay healthier, but access to health care services must also be a key priority at the national level. [Four million children](#) currently lack health insurance and that number [has increased for three years in a row](#) after two decades of progress. COVID-19 is further exacerbating the problem as parents lose their coverage due to layoffs. While universal health care remains a politically contentious issue, we should all be able to agree on the value of ensuring children can get the health care they need to ensure they have healthy, successful futures. We must protect Medicaid from arbitrary per capita limits and block grants that lead to long-term shortfalls particularly during public health crises, economic recessions, and natural disasters and imperil coverage for kids. The Children's Health Insurance Program is one of our country's greatest accomplishments for children, and it must be made permanent rather than continuing to be held at the mercy of political maneuvering every budget cycle. This extends to mental health as well. Children's early years are crucial for their long-term mental health and brain development and in this traumatic time, access to mental health care will be more vital than ever. [More and more children](#) are exhibiting symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other conditions, and without treatment they could be living with the effects for a lifetime. Our communities need more mental health clinics and schools need to have mental health professionals to work with students who need this care.

Lastly, we must consider the unique circumstances of children placed in government systems. We have for too long witnessed the damage that racism has done to Black children and their families. A [seminal 2017 study](#) found that a shocking 53% of Black children in the U.S. will be investigated as potential victims of child abuse by age 18, 16% higher than the rate for all children even though studies show no relationship between race and child maltreatment. Once in the system, Black children also are more likely to languish in foster care, less likely to be reunified with their families, more likely to be placed in group care, age out in greater numbers, and become involved in the criminal justice system.

In this case, prevention is absolutely the best medicine. We can prevent child separations in the first place by addressing underlying factors including systemic discrimination, poverty, and inadequate access to health care. We must reform child abuse and neglect surveillance and removal policies that reinforce structural racism, criminalize poverty and tear apart families of color. And state lawmakers need to end the continued inappropriate placement of children in congregate care in the wake of long known harms to youth who are unnecessarily institutionalized.

At a time when there is so much that divides us, caring about kids should be one thing that unites us. The recommendations we are making will give our children the chance to thrive. If they do, our nation will reap the benefits for generations to come.

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First Name	Last Name
Email Address	

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