

November 16, 2010

Dear Senator/Representative X,

As organizations working to ensure the health, well-being and current and future success of children, youth and families, we are writing you about pressing issues of economic security that need to be addressed in the 2010 end of year session. We urge you to pass targeted legislation that will provide millions of American families the means necessary to weather the current economic storm, and support for the years ahead that will allow the children and youth of today to become productive citizens tomorrow.

Further, we strongly urge you to prevent cuts in services and benefits that children and families need, including essential programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/food stamps).

Unemployment Insurance and the TANF Emergency Fund

We support the passage of an extension of federal Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits and the TANF Emergency Fund. Federal extended UI benefits lifted nearly a million children out of poverty in 2009, 29 percent of the 3.3 million people who were kept out of poverty by unemployment assistance. The expanded benefits available in 2009 made a tremendous difference, more than tripling the number of children raised out of poverty by UI in just one year. Temporary expansion of unemployment benefits is widely viewed as one of the most timely and effective means of helping to strengthen a weak economy and create jobs.

The TANF Emergency Fund was another lifeline for both families and communities as it created jobs for 120,000 youth and 130,000 parents (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities), while increasing capacity in small businesses. Unfortunately, this extremely effective jobs and assistance program expired September 30, and federal extended UI is currently scheduled to expire November 30. We ask Congress to extend these programs for at least one year retroactive to September 30 of 2010. The most recent Blue Chip forecast projects unemployment at or above 9% for the next year. The Brookings Institution's Center on Children and Families estimates that child poverty will continue to rise through 2014, when more than one in four children will be poor. Extended emergency federal UI benefits and the TANF Emergency Fund are urgently needed to keep poverty from overtaking still more families with children and to enable those hit hardest by the recession to care for their families until more jobs become available.

Refundable Tax Credits and Ensuring that Tax Cuts for the Wealthiest Americans Expire this Year

In addition to temporary legislation in response to the continuing economic crisis, the undersigned ask Congress to enact legislation to help improve economic security in low- and moderate-income working families with children. One of the most important steps Congress can take in November to protect this vulnerable population is to continue the current levels of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), both of which have proven

track records in encouraging work and building economic security for families. According to the latest Census data, 15.5 million American children lived in poverty in 2009. If the 2009 CTC improvement is ended, the number of poor children will grow by 600,000 children, and poverty will become deeper for 4 million already poor children. We ask that this improvement, which counted more of an earner's wages below \$13,000 in determining the credit, be made permanent. In addition, the improvements made to the EITC, including a reduction in the "marriage penalty" and an increase for families with three or more children should also be made permanent. These improvements to the EITC prevented 3 million Americans from falling into poverty in 2009.

While we urge Congress to make permanent the refundable tax credits discussed above, we also urge Congress to ensure that the tax cuts for individuals making over \$200,000 per year and families making over \$250,000 expire on schedule this year. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, if continued, these cuts will add at least \$1 trillion to the national debt over the next decade. Additionally, extension of the high-income tax cuts has been shown to be a very weak and ineffective stimulus option. In fact, the Congressional Budget Office rates extending the high-income tax cuts as the least effective means under discussion for improving the economy and creating jobs. Allowing the high-income tax cuts to expire would free up almost \$40 billion in revenue in 2010. This is money that could be used to provide further fiscal relief to states, or fund any of the programs outlined in this letter, any of which would provide far greater benefit to the American economy in the short and long run than would extending the high-income tax cuts.

Child Nutrition Reauthorization and Protect Programs That Benefit Children and Youth Such as SNAP

We urge Congress to pass Child Nutrition reauthorization legislation in November. Child hunger in the United States is becoming increasingly prevalent, and the nation also faces an epidemic of childhood obesity. Expanding participation in school lunch, school breakfast, afterschool and summer food and child care food is essential. Limited resources have forced districts to struggle with balancing adequate nutrition with ever shrinking budgets. For an increasing number of children, school meals are their major source of nourishment; a fact that makes it all the more critical to ensure that more hungry children are served and that the nutritional value of their meals is improved. Additionally, as parents work longer hours, and children often do not have a hot meal to come home to, child care and afterschool programs need the resources to offer a third meal, rather than just a snack. Finally, for millions of children in this country, summer vacation is a time when they do not have consistent access to food. It is imperative that more funding be made available for summer feeding programs at sites where children gather. We ask Congress to address these issues when it returns in November through the passage of a strong Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill.

Child Support

Last year, government child support agencies collected \$26.4 billion from non-custodial parents, of which \$24.7 billion went to the families with children owed support. For every dollar invested by the government in the collection of child support, nearly five dollars is collected.

For those poor families who receive it, child support makes up 40 percent of their income. The five hundred percent return on investment also saves federal and state governments millions of dollars each year in social service costs as single parents are provided a source of reliable supplemental income. In addition, child support holds non-custodial parents accountable for their child's well-being. If federal incentive match payments are discontinued, HHS estimates that collections will decline by \$2 billion a year - funds needed by low-income custodial families. The undersigned ask Congress to maintain the incentive payment structure enacted in 1998 that rewards efficient, results-oriented programs and penalizes those not meeting standards.

It is absolutely essential that Congress prevents cuts from taking effect in key programs that benefit children, youth and families, including SNAP. Reductions to these programs undermine children's health and development as well as their families' economic security. We know that investing in children, youth and families today will pay dividends in the coming years. It is counter-productive to use dollars from one children's program to fund another, as these programs work together to meet the needs of children throughout their lives, in their schools, communities and homes, from birth to young adulthood.

We ask that you act on the legislation outlined above when you return in November. From addressing the current economic crisis, to ensuring America's children receive adequate nutrition and providing tax credits to encourage work and promote family economic security, each of these measures will help to ensure our nation's children are prepared for school, work and life.

Should you have any questions, or would like more information, please contact Jennifer Rison at rison@childrensleadershipcouncil.org.

Sincerely:

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Child and Family Policy Center of Iowa

Coalition on Human Needs (CHN)

Every Child Matters Education Fund

Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)

Forum for Youth Investment

Oral Health America

National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA)

National Human Services Assembly

National Women's Law Center

Prevent Child Abuse America

Voices for America's Children

Voices for Virginia's Children

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