



CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA

# 2023 Legislative Agenda

*Advancing Excellence in Practice & Policy*

## HOT TOPIC:

### Protect Vital Human Services in the Budget and Appropriations Debate

#### Action

- Invest in and fully fund the child welfare continuum of services.
- Appropriate the highest possible totals for Non-Defense Discretionary Funding across the board, particularly for the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, and reject federal funding cuts to programs that support children and families.

#### Background

In Fiscal Year 2022, there was a marked increase in spending on children, largely due to COVID-19 relief funding that supported crucial programs during the pandemic. First Focus on Children's annual Children's Budget Book found that, "[t]he convergence of terrific Champions for Children in Congress, years of groundwork by child advocates, and a global pandemic have resulted in an unprecedented and record share of spending for children in the federal budget in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022: 11.98% combined (11.88% on domestic and 0.10% on international)."

As pandemic relief funding and the public health emergency have expired, most of these investments have not been sustained and programs and services for children have again been reduced in their capacity to meet the needs of our communities. As Congress debates the best path forward amidst the looming debt ceiling debate and the impact of inflation, it is essential that child and family well-being is a top priority in the FY 2024 budget.

These investments reflect the will of the public. In a Lake Research Partners national survey published in May 2022, voters expressed overwhelming support for funding for children, including the Child Tax Credit expansion. By wide margins, voters also shared their belief that the federal

government is spending "too little" rather than "too much" on a wide array of issues, such as child abuse and neglect, child poverty, child hunger, child homelessness, public education, early childhood education and child care, and health care.

#### Fully Fund the Child Welfare System

The child welfare system has been critically underfunded for decades. The percentage of children that are covered under Title IV-E funding has eroded to less than 39% of children due to outdated eligibility requirements tied to the 1996 AFDC standards. This erosion of eligibility for federal reimbursement has strained state child welfare budgets, especially when coupled with cuts, flat funding, or small increases in discretionary funding that have not kept pace with inflation. At times when federal deficits were increasing, child welfare spending was being cut.

To effectively provide a child welfare continuum of services including prevention of child maltreatment, prevention of the placement of children into foster care, assistance to children in foster care, recruitment of new families for kinship care and adoption, and support for all children who have returned to their families, are living with relatives, or have been adopted post-placement services, it's necessary for Congress to fully fund these services and programs. Increased funding in the following areas will lead to a stronger, better-resourced workforce that is able to serve more families.

- The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) is the principal federal guidance regarding the protection of children and prevention of maltreatment. It has received small increases in the last four years but at \$105 million, it falls far short of its potential. **Increase CAPTA State Grants to \$270 million.**
- The Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CB-CAP) funding supports community-based efforts to develop, operate, expand, and coordinate programs and activities to prevent child abuse and neglect. Funding for this program has gradually increased in the last four

years to just over \$70 million in FY 2023, but CBCAP needs a significant increase. **Increase CAPTA Title II to \$270 million and prioritize parity in spending on Titles I and II.**

- Child Welfare Services (CWS) provides much-needed flexible child welfare funding that assists state child protection systems and supports families through wraparound services. CWS has been reduced to \$269 million, far below its high point of more than \$290 million in the early 1990s. **Increase CWS to the full authorized level of \$325 million.**
- The Promoting Safe and Stable Families program (PSSF) targets funding to help four categories of families: families who adopt, families who are reunifying, families avoiding foster care through preservation services, and families who are vulnerable. Between mandatory and discretionary funding, the services reached their peak in 2004 at \$405 million but are down to \$360 million today. PSSF also includes funding for Regional Partnership Grants, the Court Improvement Program, and Kinship Navigator programs. **Increase discretionary appropriations for these services and programs to \$200 million.**
- The Adoption Opportunities program funds post-adoption support and recruitment of adoptive families, including families willing to adopt older youth, youth from underserved populations, and children with special needs. **Fully fund Adoption Opportunities at \$60 million.**
- The Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) provide critical support for youth that transition out of foster care to independence. Currently funded at only \$44 million, ETV funding should be **increased to the full authorized amount of \$60 million.**

## Expand Other Federal Funding for Children and Families

In addition to funding that goes directly to child welfare agencies and services, there is a wide array of programs and systems that are funded through the Appropriations process that provide necessary support to stabilize families and help to keep children out of the foster care system. The programs funded in

the Labor-HHS-Education bill in particular strengthen our nation by improving children's lives and meeting basic needs for families both those involved with the child welfare system and those who are vulnerable to child welfare involvement.

To best support families and prevent children from entering the child welfare system, Congress should make the following increases and investments:

- Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG): At least an additional \$4.38 billion (a total of at least \$12.4 billion), which will expand the base CCDBG budget to help grow the supply and availability of care for more families while supporting states in making targeted investments to their child care systems aligned with longer-term needs.
- Head Start: \$16,466,557,000 to maximize the role that Head Start plays in supporting children who are the most vulnerable and their families by sustaining and supporting the Head Start workforce; providing flexibility to address local quality improvement priorities, including the epidemic of childhood trauma; and addressing deferred maintenance issues and facility constraints.
- Maternal Health: At least \$1 billion for the Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Services Block Grant to promote sustainable public health programs centered on the needs of our nation's women, children, and families.
- Mental Health: A total of no less than \$1.25 billion for the Mental Health Block Grant (MHBG) to fund states to carry out plans for providing comprehensive community mental health services for adults and children, with an allowable use for prevention/early intervention services up to 5% with new money.

## Conclusion

It is imperative that Congress continue to move forward by increasing spending on Non-Defense Discretionary programs that serve children and families, providing necessary supports that can build a strong foundation for all families and reduce the instances of child maltreatment and neglect. Child well-being is not a partisan issue and spending on children should be an area in which lawmakers can find substantial common ground.

## CWLA Advocacy Team

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