



children's  
defense fund  
ohio



May 7, 2020

The Honorable Sherrod Brown  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rob Portman  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

**RE: Emergency Funding for Child Welfare in the next COVID-19 Relief package**

Dear Senator Brown and Senator Portman,

As Ohio organizations working to ensure the well-being of our children and families, we urge you to ensure Congress sends funds to strengthen the state and local systems that prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect and that address the needs of children, youth, and families already in the foster care system.

The impacts of COVID-19 are putting stress on families who are attempting to navigate new public health safety protocols, school closures, uncertain childcare arrangements, job losses, social isolation, and significant barriers to many critical support services. These kinds of stress increase the risk of child abuse and neglect at the same time family supports and child welfare response are challenged by the public health crisis. Facing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the entire child welfare continuum. That's why the undersigned organizations joined nearly 600 national, state, and local organizations in signing this letter urging Congress to act swiftly to support our children and families.

In Ohio, despite the stay-at-home order, children services agencies continue to meet their mandates, including accepting referrals of abuse and neglect from the public, initiating timely investigations of cases that are screened in, and ensuring the safety of children with an open case—whether that is for in-home services, temporary custody or permanent custody. However, the pandemic has required some changes in practice; in-person visits by caseworkers and between birth parents and children in foster care are limited, instead relying on virtual visits when there are COVID-19 safety concerns; some court hearings are delayed, making it difficult for reunification of families or permanent placements to stay on track; navigating the court process when confronted with custody removals is challenging in the best of times. During the pandemic, it can be extremely challenging for families.

As parents are home more with their children, frustrations can flare. The parent helpline, 1-800-4-A-CHILD saw a 31% increase in calls since the beginning of the order. Though reports of child abuse are down because fewer mandated reporters are seeing children, some physicians are reporting increased child injuries. We know that as Ohio slowly reopens, and especially when schools reopen, we will see a “surge” in referrals to children services agencies. We need to make sure that the agencies are equipped and able to handle this surge. We applaud Governor DeWine's actions to delay the transition of youth out of the foster care system until after the pandemic, but this will require more resources to support both the additional time in care as well as the staff needed to provide transition support for all of these youth simultaneously.

To address these challenges and support vulnerable children and families, we urge Congress to provide dedicated funding to state and local governments and organizations. We already have the systems with trained and trusted professionals working hard every day, but states and their local partners need emergency money to continue

operations, adapt to current challenges, and meet the increased need. We urge you to provide emergency funding for the following programs:

- **\$1 billion for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) Grants.** This would help states and local organizations better meet the increased need for child abuse prevention programs and adapt services to account for social distancing.
- **\$20 million for Kinship Navigator Programs.** This would help respond to the skyrocketing demand for information and connections to resources among families where grandparents and other relatives are raising children.
- **\$1 billion for Title IV-B Part 2.** This would help child welfare agencies provide the services necessary to stabilize families, support family preservation efforts, and prevent a major influx of children into the foster care system.
- **\$500 million for CAPTA Title I.** These flexible funds would help ensure child welfare agencies' response, investigations, and interventions of child abuse and neglect are not dangerously upended.
- **\$30 million for the Court Improvement Program.** This would help address child welfare court shutdowns, reduced staffing, technological challenges and other issues that are compromising child safety and delaying family reunification.
- **Increase FMAP for Title IV-E Prevention Program.** This will help make affordable mental health and substance disorder services and other interventions that support family stabilization and keep children safe and out of foster care.
- **Increase funding to Title IV-E Chafee funds by \$500 million.** This would allow states to ensure a flexible, rapid response to the emerging needs of young people in the transition from foster care to adulthood.

Furthermore, increases to the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) are needed to help states fill in gaps to critical services including child protective services, child abuse prevention supports, domestic violence services, foster care and evidence-based home visiting.

We appreciate your consideration of this request during this unprecedented time to ensure we are supporting and sustaining Ohio's children and families.

Regards,



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Ashtabula County Children Services Board  
Advocates for Ohio's Future  
Columbiana County DJFS  
Montgomery County Department of Job and Family Services  
Muskingum County Adult and Child Protective Services  
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Directors' Association  
Policy Matters Ohio  
Providence House  
Schubert Center for Child Studies at CWRU  
Trumbull County Children Services  
Wayne County Children Services Board