

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Senate Finance Committee Democrats

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RE: Trump's War on Kids

In just months, the Trump administration has gutted access to health care for millions of children, slashed funding for school meals and nutrition assistance, fired thousands of workers dedicated to advancing child welfare and protecting children, and unleashed policies that traumatize and harm immigrant families and LGBTQ+ youth. These actions are not isolated—they reflect a coordinated agenda that will leave a generation of children sicker, hungrier, and less safe.

Republican Actions Harming Children

Trump and Republicans Enacted Historic Cuts to Children's Health Care:

Nearly half of U.S. children rely on [Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program](#) (CHIP) for health insurance. Trumpcare cuts over [\\$1 trillion](#) in federal funding from Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act (ACA), making it impossible for states to shield children and families from harm. Republican cuts threaten health care coverage for millions of children enrolled in Medicaid, despite the Republican rhetoric that no children will be harmed by their budget law.

For example, children's hospitals around the country will lose [billions of dollars](#) in revenue and will likely have to [cut staff](#) and services. Cuts to federal Medicaid funding will also likely force states to reduce spending on [long-term services and supports](#), leaving many children with disabilities without the in-home supports they need to live, learn, and thrive in their communities. Even if kids aren't directly impacted, when parents lose health insurance due to so-called "work requirements" and other needless administrative burdens and red tape, their kids are [more likely](#) to experience issues with their coverage.

In addition, approximately [2 million](#) children receive their health care coverage through the ACA Marketplaces. Republicans refused to extend enhanced middle-class premium *tax* credits in their partisan tax bill, giving tax handouts to billionaires and wealthy corporations, and this decision is wreaking havoc on insurance markets nationwide. Over 20 million working people who buy their own health insurance will see their share of [premiums double](#) on average next year, and many will see their [monthly costs double](#). Republicans' failure to extend the tax credits will lead to higher prices and unaffordable coverage for children and families. Additionally, the Republican bill riddles the ACA with new red tape requirements, ensnaring Americans in bureaucratic hurdles that will terminate their health coverage. The bill includes arbitrary and redundant enrollment and re-enrollment verification requirements intended to make it harder for millions of families to get coverage and keep coverage year-to-year.

Trump and Republicans Slashed Food Aid for Children:

The 2025 Republican budget law delivers the largest cut to food assistance in U.S. history, slashing over \$186 billion in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. These cuts to SNAP will affect each of the 42 million people participating in SNAP, including 16 million children, 8 million seniors, and 4 million people with disabilities, and will terminate benefits entirely for at least [2.4 million people](#). Children who lose SNAP will [also](#) lose their automatic eligibility for free school meals and for the Summer EBT program, taking away a critical source of nutrition during the school year and summer months.

The [Trump administration's actions](#) during the government shutdown further demonstrated its determination to take food away from American families, including millions of American children. First, despite having funding available for SNAP during the shutdown, the Trump administration changed long-standing precedent and even reversed its own guidance in arguing that it could not use SNAP contingency funds for SNAP benefits during the shutdown. When ordered to do so by two federal judges, the Trump administration went all the way to the Supreme Court to avoid paying full SNAP benefits for November. While ultimately the shutdown ended on November 12, before a final ruling from the Supreme Court, the Trump Administration's actions meant that SNAP benefits were paused for the first time in history and that ultimately SNAP assistance was needlessly delayed, reduced, and denied, creating hardship for tens of millions of people going into the holiday season.

Just days after the end of the government shutdown, the Trump administration [announced](#) that it would require all SNAP households to reapply for SNAP benefits. Though details of this plan were not provided, under existing SNAP rules, states are already required to certify households for a set amount of time, typically 6-12 months, at the end of which households are required to recertify eligibility for benefits. As such, USDA's "reapplication" announcement appears to be designed to make it more difficult for SNAP households, 34 percent of which contain children, from retaining SNAP benefits for which they have already been certified to be eligible.

This is on top of the Trump administration's actions to destroy programs that deliver key food assistance for kids. SNAP-Ed, which teaches kids about healthy eating, has been [completely defunded](#). The Trump administration terminated over [\\$1 billion in local food purchasing grants for schools and food banks](#), cutting off access to fresh local food for kids. Trump also [canceled 94 million pounds of food aid](#) for food banks, leaving local pantries struggling to meet demand from kids and families. The Trump administration has also been working to revive a [proposed rule](#) from [his first term](#) that would create more red tape for families applying to SNAP, which would have resulted in [over 1 million children](#) losing access to free school meals. Additionally, Trump's fiscal year 2026 budget proposed to eliminate more than \$1.3 billion in fruit and vegetable benefits from [5.2 million participants](#) of WIC (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children). These deep cuts will leave families with nowhere to turn to help put food on the table and will increase poverty and hunger for children.

In addition to enacting dramatic cuts to food assistance programs, the Trump Administration is also actively trying to escape accountability for its actions, [cancelling](#) a 30-year-old study that measures hunger and food insecurity in America. The food insecurity study is the gold standard measure of hunger in America, including among children, and its elimination will cancel a key tool for understanding hunger and food insecurity at a moment where there is every reason to believe that the actions of the Trump Administration will cause them to rise.

Trump and Kennedy Are Attacking Childhood Vaccines:

Vaccines saved more than [one million lives](#) among the 117 million children born in the United States between 1994 and 2023.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kennedy fired every member of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and replaced them with vaccine skeptics who have conflicts of interest, undermining confidence in vaccines, creating chaos and confusion for parents, and jeopardizing children's health. The ACIP recently [announced](#) the formation of a workgroup to reconsider the childhood and adolescent immunization schedule, despite having used a rigorous process for decades to review evidence and update the schedule. Because ACIP recommendations determine coverage across multiple payers and in the Vaccines for Children program, [millions more low-income kids](#) are at risk of losing access to lifesaving immunizations.

Under Kennedy's leadership, ACIP voted to remove its recommendation allowing families to choose the combined measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella (MMRV) vaccine for young children, against the advice of the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).

While Kennedy undercuts families' ability to access safe and effective vaccines, measles has been spreading at the highest rates since it was confirmed eliminated 25 years ago. Across the country, the CDC has confirmed [43 measles outbreaks in 41 states](#) this year, and the majority of cases were in unvaccinated people. One of the worst outbreaks occurred in Texas, where two unvaccinated children died, and 99 people were hospitalized between January and July 2025. In addition to the outbreak in Texas, 139 school children in South Carolina are currently in quarantine, with 59 confirmed cases in Utah, 94 in Arizona, and 23 in Minnesota.

Trump's Federal Firings Threaten Child Welfare and Education:

Trump's mass federal firings gutted programs that protect, educate, and care for children at home and abroad. Since January, more than [154,000 federal workers](#) have been pushed out—many from [agencies central to children's well-being](#), health, and education.

At HHS, cuts severely weakened the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), threatening child care, Head Start, and maternal and infant health programs. Within ACF, the entire staff of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) was [fired](#), risking a \$4.1 billion program that helps

millions of families pay utility bills so their children can survive extreme heat or cold. Trump similarly withheld and delayed funding for Head Start, a federal-to-local program that provides free educational, health, nutritional, and social services to nearly 800,000 young children and their families each year. The federal government distributed nearly \$1 billion less in federal grants to Head Start programs across the country between January and April of 2025, compared with the same period last year. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) [reviewed these funding delays](#) and determined the Trump Administration violated the Impoundment Control Act, illegally withholding Congressionally-appropriated funding for Head Start.

In Oregon, multiple Head Start programs have faced significant delays in the disbursement of already-awarded funding. Head Start classrooms in Central Washington were forced to temporarily [close](#), leaving 400 children without education and care. In addition, HHS abruptly closed five out of ten Office of Head Start regional offices in April, leaving nearly 800 Head Start programs—or 41 percent of all grantees—serving about 318,000 children without dedicated points of contact for grant modifications, investigating child health and safety incidents, and providing training and technical assistance for high-quality services to children.

Within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the elimination of the Office on Smoking and Health and the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control will lead to less oversight of youth tobacco use, firearm safety, and child abuse prevention. In addition, the team at CDC that monitors lead poisoning in children was eliminated, just as [Milwaukee schools](#) begged for federal support in responding to toxic school drinking water.

The damage to children's well-being doesn't stop at HHS. Trump fired half of the U.S. Department of Education's workforce and moved to dismantle the agency entirely, jeopardizing protections for students with disabilities and other vulnerable students. They [fired virtually](#) the entire staff who work on Title I for students from low-income families, McKinney-Vento for students experiencing homelessness, and other critical federal programs. In addition, Trump fired all of the staff responsible for \$15 billion in [special education](#) funding and oversight of state special education services for 7.5 million children with disabilities. The U.S. Department of Labor slashed programs aimed at ending [child labor and trafficking](#).

Trump's crusade against the federal workforce is a war on kids—dismantling the very systems that keep children safe, healthy, and hopeful for the future.

Trump, Kennedy, and Republicans Are Advancing Cruel Immigration Policies That Harm Vulnerable Children: From his earliest days in office, Trump advanced policies that directly endangered the safety and well-being of vulnerable, immigrant children. He signed an executive order to [end birthright citizenship](#) and rescinded protections that kept Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) out of sensitive locations, like schools, health care facilities, courthouses, places of worship, and child care centers. These actions had [a chilling effect](#): families pulled their children out of school and avoided seeking health care and food assistance.

Today, an estimated [5.62 million](#) U.S. citizen children live in mixed-status households with at least one undocumented family member. Trump's aggressive enforcement policies have made these U.S. citizen children collateral damage. In one especially cruel case, a [4-year-old American citizen](#) with stage 4 cancer was deported to Honduras without access to treatment, following enforcement action against his parents. In another chilling case, [four young U.S. citizen children](#) were disappeared for days, detained for two weeks, denied legal counsel, and separated from their mother, who is lawfully present in the United States and has not been charged with a crime. Their mother was detained for four months by ICE, and after significant public outcry, a judge's ruling, and continued congressional pressure, she was released to reunite with her children.

The Trump administration temporarily defunded legal representation for children under the [Unaccompanied Children Program](#), causing mass job loss among legal service providers. This put vulnerable children at an even higher likelihood of entering immigration proceedings alone and dismantled an essential safeguard against trafficking and abuse. Under Trump's leadership, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), a child welfare agency, also began [sharing sensitive information with ICE](#), which imperils the privacy and security of vulnerable children, sponsors, and family members. Additionally, onerous sponsor vetting requirements, including fingerprinting, background checks, and the threat of information-sharing with ICE, have deterred many family members and caring adults from coming forward to sponsor children in ORR custody. Taken together, these policies cause children to languish in ORR custody, in detention-like facilities for months on end, increasing their risk of trauma and long-term harm to their mental health.

Over Labor Day weekend, Trump further escalated attacks on unaccompanied children in ORR custody by attempting to deport children, under the cover of night, to Guatemala. Many of these children had indicators of [abuse and human trafficking](#), which led to their fleeing from Guatemala in the first place. After a judge blocked the deportations, the ORR acting director moved to phase two of [their plan](#): bribing vulnerable children to abandon their asylum claims, sign away their rights to future relief, and self-deport for \$2,500.

These tactics amount to state-sanctioned coercion of vulnerable children, many of whom came to the United States seeking refuge from abuse, neglect, trafficking, and violence, and the clear co-optation of a child welfare agency into an enforcement arm.

Trump and Republicans Launched a War on LGBTQ+ Youth:

Trump's January 2025 [executive order](#) directs federal agencies to significantly limit access to gender-affirming care for anyone under age 19. The order includes inaccurate and stigmatizing claims about transgender youth and directs HHS to replace evidence-based care standards with politically driven definitions and approaches. It also signals the administration's intent to reinterpret [Section 1557](#) of the ACA to remove explicit protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

In May, [CMS issued](#) a directive stating that “Medicaid dollars are not to be used for gender reassignment surgeries or hormone treatments in minors,” further restricting care and threatening providers with funding loss compounded by Republicans’ largest Medicaid cuts in history. In addition, [NPR](#) obtained draft text of a Trump administration [proposed rule](#) that would ban Medicaid and CHIP coverage of gender-affirming care for children. Another [proposed rule](#) would go even further—cutting off all Medicaid and Medicare funding for hospitals that provide pediatric gender-affirming care and effectively eliminating access for kids nationwide. These actions have a profound impact on youth mental health. Research [shows](#) that access to gender-affirming care significantly reduces depression, anxiety, and suicide risk among transgender youth, and restricting that care leads to worse mental health outcomes and increased suicidality. Roughly [300,000 U.S. adolescents](#) identify as transgender, all of whom are at risk of losing care, facing stigma, and being driven out of their communities in search of basic medical support due to Trump’s actions.

Additionally, in July, the Trump administration [eliminated](#) the specialized line for LGBTQ+ youth within the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. [Suicide](#) is the second leading cause of death for youth 10-14, and LGBTQ+ youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide. Since its inception, over [1.5 million](#) LGBTQ+ youth have called, texted, or chatted with 988 and have been able to receive specialized services. Understanding the need for these specific services, the dedicated 988 line for this population has been a bipartisan effort.

The Trump administration has significantly scaled back students’ civil rights enforcement while simultaneously weaponizing it against marginalized students. They fired over half of their workforce and [eliminated seven of 12 regional offices](#) for the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights. At the same time, the Trump administration is using Title IX enforcement authority to [investigate and threaten federal funding](#) from schools, colleges, and universities that do not comply with the Trump administration’s political agenda, such as by excluding transgender students from participating in girls’ and women’s sports. During the same period, the Trump administration has made little progress in resolving other urgent complaints from children and families, such as about sex-based discrimination, racial harassment, or disability discrimination.

Trump and Republicans Cut Mental Health Programs for Kids:

Trump is taking away access to mental health services for children across the country by dismantling the systems that ensure access to these services. Trump and Kennedy are dissolving the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) by [proposing](#) to cut critical programs and reduce the number of staff at the agency by half. At the beginning of October, the Trump administration issued reduction-in-force (RIF) notices to about [4,100](#) federal employees. These RIFs put [every](#) SAMHSA employee who handled youth mental health on administrative leave. These cuts mean there is no one to oversee critical programs that put mental health counselors in schools, promote social and emotional development, prevent mental, emotional,

and behavioral health conditions, and identify and address the needs of children with serious emotional disturbances.

In addition to cutting critical SAMHSA programs, Trump is attacking the Department of Education and its resources for supporting children with behavioral health needs. In April, the Trump administration canceled \$1 billion that Congress had appropriated for school districts to hire school-based mental health staff and for colleges to address mental health workforce shortages.

Trump and Republicans Made it Harder for Kids to Access Their Benefits:

Today, over [4.6 million](#) kids receive benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA) — 3.6 million receiving Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) benefits and 1 million receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. Each year, Social Security helps keep nearly [1 million](#) kids out of poverty. But Trump has taken an ax to this critical poverty-fighting program and made it harder for kids and their families to access their benefits. Trump has slashed SSA's workforce by nearly 6,000 people, resulting in longer wait times at the [field offices](#) and on the [phone](#) for beneficiaries seeking assistance.

On top of the staffing cuts and longer wait times, the Trump Administration is preparing [a rule](#) that would cut or eliminate Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for nearly 400,000 low-income seniors, disabled adults, and children — many of whom live with family members who also struggle financially. The rule would roll back a recent update that allowed families receiving SNAP to qualify as “public assistance households,” thereby protecting SSI recipients from harsh benefit cuts. By removing SNAP from this definition, the administration would slash monthly SSI payments for over 275,000 people or strip eligibility entirely for over 100,000 people, forcing families to choose between housing loved ones or keeping their benefits. The proposal would add burdensome red tape for both beneficiaries and the already-overstretched Social Security Administration, while saving less money than a single day of Trump's massive tax cuts for the wealthy.

In short, Trump's attack on Social Security will leave struggling families with fewer resources and more barriers, putting low-income children and kids with disabilities at greater risk of poverty and hardship.

Trump's Tax Bill Left the Most Vulnerable Children Behind:

Republicans tout their tax bill's expansion to the child tax credit, but they deliberately designed a policy that prohibits [almost 20 million low-income kids](#)—over a quarter of all children—from benefiting from the full value of the credit. The child tax credit is a proven tool for lifting families out of poverty. Still, instead of targeting an expansion of the credit to families living below the poverty line, Republicans left these families out entirely and gave trillions in tax breaks to the ultra-wealthy and massive corporations.

Trump and Republicans Abandoned Children Worldwide:

Trump placed thousands of USAID staff on leave and moved to illegally dissolve the agency, cutting off more than [\\$4 billion](#) for programs that fight malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV in children overseas, expand maternal and infant health, provide clean water, combat trafficking, and support basic education.

These cuts are projected to lead to the deaths of [4.5 million children](#) under five by 2030. Trump's abandonment of America's global leadership will reverse decades of progress to improve children's survival across the world.

Trump's Actions Are Causing Both Immediate and Long-Term Harms

Immediate

- **Lost Coverage:** Millions of children are losing their health insurance and access to doctors, vaccines, and necessary treatments.
- **Rising Hunger:** SNAP cuts, food aid cancellations, and USDA rollbacks are leaving kids hungry.
- **Unregulated Child Care and Education:** Firings across the federal government put Head Start and special education programs at risk.
- **Weakened Child Protection:** Cuts to child welfare programs mean fewer protections for abused, neglected, and runaway children.
- **Lost Benefits:** Layoffs and rule changes at the Social Security Administration put children at greater risk of living in poverty.
- **Public Health Failures:** Vaccine chaos, lead exposure, and cuts to HIV prevention threaten children's health worldwide. Kennedy and Trump's [unproven statements](#) about the link between Tylenol, circumcision, and autism are adding fear and confusion for families.
- **Family Deportation and Coercion:** Trump's deportation machine is separating and exiling entire families, including U.S. citizen children, cutting them off from their homes, schools, and doctors. In ORR custody, unaccompanied minors are facing prolonged separation from their families, languishing in detention, and being coerced into signing away their rights to asylum and accepting cash payments to leave the country.

Long-Term

- **Lost Coverage:** By gutting Medicaid and the ACA, Trump has ensured that millions of children will go without preventive care, immunizations, and treatment for chronic conditions. This will inevitably lead to higher child mortality and worse health outcomes that will persist throughout their lives.
- **Lost Earnings:** The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office [found](#) that Medicaid and CHIP coverage for children leads to better health and higher earnings in adulthood. When

kids lose coverage, they don't just face worse health outcomes—they also lose out on future income and economic opportunity.

- **Lost Nutrition and Stability:** Cuts to SNAP, WIC, and school meals will cause lasting developmental harm, stunting growth, weakening immune systems, and increasing poverty as families struggle to meet basic needs.
- **Lost Protection:** The collapse of child welfare systems and the elimination of critical oversight programs will leave children unprotected, with lasting trauma and lifelong consequences.
- **Lost Education:** Head Start and early education cuts will deny millions of children the foundation they need to succeed in school and beyond, perpetuating cycles of poverty.
- **Lost Leadership:** For generations, America has invested in child health, education, and welfare globally. Trump's reckless, anti-science, and anti-child agenda is dismantling that legacy, threatening not only the well-being of today's children but the strength and promise of America's future.

Bottom Line: Trump is Waging a War on America's Children

Trump's cuts to health care access, food assistance, and education have stripped millions of kids of the care, nutrition, and protection they need to thrive. By dismantling the very systems that safeguard children's health and future, Trump and Republicans are condemning a generation to poorer health, deeper poverty, and diminished opportunity. Unless stopped, Trump's war on kids will leave lasting scars on millions of children and weaken the nation for decades to come.