

WAR ON KIDS: How Republican Cuts Hurt Children

Trump, Elon Musk and Congressional Republicans are intent on slashing essential programs for kids. These drastic cuts will worsen poverty, food insecurity, and health; shift unsustainable cost burdens to states; and undermine access to affordable child care and child protection services, increasing child removals.

Children are approximately 23% of the U.S. population, but in 2024, they received not even 9% of federal spending. This chronic underinvestment in children has already resulted in a dramatic rise in child poverty—from 5.2% in 2021 to 13.7% in 2023.

Congress Should Protect—Not Hurt—Kids

Republican cuts are not just numbers—they represent real harm to children's health, nutrition, care and early development, and economic security. The loss of essential federal funding would be catastrophic – state budgets will never recover.

In the United States, 1 in 5 children ([20.8%](#)) live in poverty, and Republican cuts will only make this crisis worse. Investing in children reduces poverty, improves health outcomes, and strengthens the future workforce. **Congress must reject devastating cuts and prioritize kids' well-being.**

Health Care Cuts: Making Children Sicker

- Nearly [38 million kids](#) are enrolled in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), covering around [2 in 5 children](#) in the U.S. Medicaid also covers more than [40% of all births](#). Kids rely on Medicaid for home-based services, school-based services, and more. Every proposal on the Republican [wish list](#) of more than \$2 trillion in Medicaid cuts is [bad news for kids and families](#).
- Catastrophic cuts of hundreds of billions would shift costs to states, leading to coverage loss, benefits cuts, and lower payment rates for hospitals, behavioral health specialists, and other providers—putting children at risk of losing coverage and access to care.
- Children will be harmed by Republican cuts targeted at people with Medicaid expansion. Kids are more likely to have health coverage if their parents are insured, so coverage loss among parents from Medicaid cuts will lead to more uninsured children. Republicans will also bring back annual and lifetime benefit limits, lockout periods, and waiting periods for kids in CHIP.
- Along with Medicaid and CHIP, Marketplace coverage created by the Affordable Care Act has played a key role in keeping down the rate of uninsured families, and roughly [1 million children](#) have coverage from a Marketplace plan. More than 90% of people enrolled in a Marketplace plan rely on tax credits to be able to afford coverage.
- Starting next year, these tax credits will be taken away, causing premiums to skyrocket, and leading to coverage losses. Unless Republicans act, this Marketplace coverage will become unaffordable, harming the families and children who rely on this coverage to stay healthy and afford other basic needs, like food, housing, and utilities.

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IMPACT ON KIDS:

- **More children dying and getting sicker.**
- Higher child mortality and preventable illnesses.
- Fewer mental health services when youth suicide and depression rates are rising.
- Lost access to school-based therapies and services.

SNAP Cuts: Increasing Child Hunger

- SNAP helps 42 million Americans—including 16 million children—to put food on their tables each month, helping about 1 in 5 kids in the U.S. have enough to eat. Because adequate nutrition is so important for children's health and development, the long-term return on investment is significant: [every \\$1 invested in SNAP returns \\$62 in value](#).
- Republicans' House-passed budget resolution requires \$230 billion in cuts to food assistance. Cuts of this magnitude—or anything close to it—would be devastating to American families in every state.
- SNAP benefits currently average only \$6.20 per person per day. At a time when people across the country are struggling with the high cost of groceries, cuts of this size would result in [an immediate increase in food costs](#), dropping the projected SNAP benefit in 2026 by \$1.40 per day, or over \$500 per year per person.
- A new unfunded mandate requiring states to by tens or even hundreds of billions in SNAP costs would force states to cut benefits, severely restrict program eligibility, or both. Community providers, such as food banks, schools, and community action agencies will be left to try and fill a role abandoned by the federal government.
- Other proposals to roll back Thrifty Food Plan updates (the basis for SNAP benefits), limit state flexibility on income and asset limits that 45 states have used, or expand SNAP's harsh, existing work requirement to some families with children would take food away from children.
- Children who receive SNAP benefits report better health outcomes than non-recipients, and kids who lose SNAP benefits have poorer health outcomes. Hungry kids struggle to focus in school, leading to lower test scores and graduation rates.
- Participation in the SNAP program streamlines access to other assistance. Cuts to SNAP would make it harder for families to receive school lunch and breakfast, summer nutrition assistance, or WIC benefits.

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IMPACT ON KIDS:

- **More children going hungry;** [SNAP reduces food insecurity by 30%](#).
- Lower academic performance, poor health, and fewer school meals.

TANF Cuts: Throwing Kids and Families into Extreme Poverty

- **70% of people receiving TANF assistance are children.** Every proposal on the Republican [wish list](#) including billions in TANF cuts is bad news for kids.
- TANF gives direct aid to families in crisis. Without it, children will experience increased homelessness and family instability. Childhood poverty is linked to poorer outcomes in every aspect of life, including lower lifetime earnings, poorer educational attainment, poorer health care outcomes, and increased rates of hunger, homelessness, and incidences of child abuse. Research finds that concrete economic supports like TANF reduce families' involvement with the child welfare system.
- States spend large shares of TANF funds on child care assistance and quality improvement. In FY23, [\\$5.2 billion or 15 percent of TANF funds](#) were transferred to the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCBG) or directly spent on the child care system. For context, Congress appropriated \$8.7 billion towards the CCBG in FY24 and FY25.
- TANF dollars are also important for preschool and Head Start. Across the country, states spent [\\$3.2 billion or 9 percent of TANF funds](#) on early learning, including preschool and Head Start programs in FY23. The federal Head Start program was funded at \$12.7 billion for FY24 and FY25.
- Cuts to TANF means families have less access to child care and cash assistance to keep their kids fed, healthy and safe. Republican cuts would restrict eligibility, impose paperwork and other bureaucratic hurdles, and decrease funding for job training and early childhood programs, including child care assistance and Head Start.

IMPACT ON KIDS:

- **More children living in extreme poverty.**
- More families going without quality, affordable child care.
- Fewer families will have access to early education, including preschool and Head Start.

SSBG Cuts: Putting Children in Harm's Way

- Nearly 10 million children benefit from Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) services. The Republican [wish list](#) would **altogether eliminate this vital funding**—gutting programs that invest in children, support families, and prevent child abuse and neglect.

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- SSBG funds essential child welfare programs, including kinship caregivers, child care, foster care, and support for struggling families. Eliminating SSBG will force states to cut services for children in need and cause more children to be separated from their families.
- SSBG also supports child protective services workers; cuts to this workforce forced by the elimination of SSBG increases the likelihood child abuse and neglect will go undetected.
- Along with TANF, SSBG provides states with the flexibility to bolster child care systems. [More than 2 million child care providers](#) received SSBG funds to maintain child care options. Eliminating SSBG will force states to cut support for early childhood development, health services to children, licensure and monitoring for child care options.

IMPACTS ON KIDS:

- **More children abused and neglected.**
- More children taken away from their families.
- More families going without quality, affordable child care.

SSI Cuts: Ripping Away Disabled Children's 'Benefit of Last Resort'

- Over 7 million low-income Americans—including 1 million children—receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) monthly benefits. Roughly one-third of families with children receiving SSI live below the federal poverty line, about \$32,000 per year for a family of four.
- SSI offers modest benefits that provide resources to help families meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. SSI also provides children a critical pathway to obtain Medicaid coverage so families can afford home-based services, school-based services, and more to help their kids succeed.
- Cutting SSI benefits or imposing more stringent eligibility requirements would throw these families further into poverty and increase the risk of homelessness and institutionalization.

IMPACT ON KIDS:

- **Push over 1 million kids into deep poverty.**
- More families struggling to afford food, shelter, and other essential expenses.
- Children with disabilities losing access to school-based therapies and services.

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Elon Musk's Cuts: Halting Help for Children

- Trump and Musk started by indiscriminately firing roughly 5,000 workers at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, including at the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Since then, 20,000 employees were fired or forced out; these include workers who support access to child care, Head Start, and mental health services for kids.
- Cuts to ACF will make child care less safe, less affordable, and harder to find for millions of working-class families. Without adequate staffing, Head Start programs will have less support to attract and retain staff, serve local families and children, and provide comprehensive health, nutrition, and educational services.
- Cuts will undercut ACF's ability to carry out its core functions which include preventing child abuse and human trafficking, helping families pay home heating and cooling bills, and supporting foster care children and grandfamilies, among other essential work. Further, the outright elimination of the Administration for Community Living (ACL) will diminish oversight of residential treatment facilities and other settings that care for vulnerable kids.
- Trump and Musk left Head Start programs across the nation without federal funding and clarity on whether the resources would materialize, and at one point, leaving 24,915 children and 7,676 Head Start staff in 25 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico in a state of uncertainty.
- The Social Security Administration, under the direction Elon Musk's DOGE, announced plans to cut at least 7,000 employees, including front-line workers who process child disability or survivor benefit claims.
- Trump's and Musk's reckless cuts and firings will also result in diminished support for research on rare diseases and cancer in children, fewer mental health services, including suicide prevention as the youth mental health crisis worsens, and diminished support for post-partum mothers who need mental health and other screenings.

IMPACT ON KIDS:

- **Children going without taxpayer-funded services and supports.**
- Delayed access to child care assistance, TANF, Head Start, and Social Security benefits.
- Less training, technical assistance, and other services for child care and early education.