

Honorable Ayanna Pressley  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1108 Longworth HOB  
Washington DC 20515

October 5, 2020

Dear Representative Pressley,

We are writing in support of the Services and Trauma-Informed Research of Outcomes in Neighborhoods Grants for Support for Children (STRONG Support for Children) Act. If passed and funded, this legislation would improve outcomes for children by establishing and supporting the use of data, cross-sector collaboration, and care coordination to prevent and effectively mitigate childhood trauma and adversity. Importantly, the legislation would allow local jurisdictions to design innovations to build upon community strengths and address local needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to have a traumatic impact on children. Economic hardship, social isolation, and anxiety have all increased because of the pandemic and emerging evidence shows increases in calls to domestic violence hotlines and fears that child maltreatment cases are being under-reported with children not in regular contact with adults outside the home. Traumatic events, when experienced or witnessed by a child are called Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) and, if not addressed, can impair healthy development and have negative impacts across the lifespan. ACEs were a public health problem before COVID-19, with 1 in 6 Americans exposed to four or more ACEs. According to the CDC, five of the ten leading causes of death in the United States are associated with exposure to ACEs. However, the pandemic and necessary responses such as school closures and economic shutdowns, coupled with new exposure to death, illness, eviction, and food insecurity plus the long-standing inequities in many communities means that poor children and children of color will bear a disproportionate burden of trauma during this time. Responses such as the STRONG Support for Children Act can help to alleviate these disparities and support the healthy development of children most impacted by the pandemic.

We know that ACEs and trauma can be prevented and mitigated by enhancing supportive relationships, especially with parents and caregivers, improving living and community conditions, and fostering supportive learning environments. These buffers can be achieved through enhanced coordination of supportive services, undoing underlying inequities in systems such as education, housing, health care and employment, and making practices within institutions trauma-informed, culturally specific, and community-based. Given existing inequities, it is critical to focus supports on communities with high-levels of adversity as measured by poverty, incarceration and police violence, educational outcomes, extreme weather events, and substance use disorder among other factors.

The STRONG Support for Children Act would help to prevent ACEs and strengthen protective buffers for children and families by establishing two innovative programs to be carried out by local public health departments with grant funding from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

- (1) Using data analytics and community engagement methods to identify strategies to improve child outcomes in communities with high levels of adversity and facilitating implementation of those strategies through increasing cross-sector collaboration, enhancing trauma-informed supports for families, and fostering connections with and funding community-based organizations and other support networks.
- (2) Expanding trauma-informed care coordination services for families with children under five who are at risk for adversity and ensuring those families have access to a comprehensive set of services, including home visiting, voluntary and non-coercive mental health supports and access to benefits aimed at improving maternal and child health outcomes.

The legislation also designates funding for a comprehensive evaluation of the above programs to identify effective elements that could be successfully replicated within other programs.

As organizations and individuals focused on improving child well-being and advancing equity, we understand that Congress must continue to act boldly to address the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by providing financial support directly to families, ensuring access to health care for everyone, and other efforts. We also understand that Congress must begin to account for the long-term health impacts of this crisis, particularly in regard to children, and begin the work of building equitable and healthy families and communities. The STRONG Support for Children Act is an important piece of that work. We are grateful for your leadership in introducing this legislation and look forward to working with you to advocate for its passage.

FamilyAid Boston  
Children's Trust Fund Alliance  
Starr Commonwealth  
National League for Nursing  
Hillsides  
Campaign for Trauma Informed Policy and Practice (CTIPP)  
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)  
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities  
Family Service Association of San Antonio  
National Youth Employment Coalition  
National Family Support Network  
Family Focused Treatment Association  
Families USA  
National Crittenton  
Children's Mental Health Campaign

Child and Family Resources, Inc.  
Community Catalyst  
National Association of Counsel for Children  
Zero to Three  
Dr. Kushak Suchdev, Boston University  
Healthy Schools Campaign  
Massachusetts Advocates for Children  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
Codman Square NDC  
Committee for Children  
The Trauma-Informed Community Initiative of Western New York  
Center for Community Resilience  
Oregon School-Based Health Alliance  
Futures Without Violence  
Casa Myrna Vazquez, Inc.  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
Children's Home & Aid  
National Child Abuse Coalition  
Mental Health America  
Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness