

Children's Defense Fund Government shut-down is affecting children, as debt-ceiling deadline grows closer



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Extremists in the U.S. House of Representatives continue to hold funding for the federal government hostage for a second week, shutting down the government. Infants, pregnant women and children are at risk of losing food benefits including costly formula for newborns. A number of Head Start programs had to close their doors to the nation's most vulnerable children. Public servants are not being paid, putting them and their families at risk of being unable to pay their bills. Tea Party extremists have pressured House Majority Leader Boehner (R-OH) not to allow the House to vote on a quick and clean extension of funding for the federal government that has bipartisan support.

And now the nation is on the verge of a financial meltdown unless Congress acts to pay our bills. The federal government will default on its debt within two weeks unless Congress raises the debt ceiling. Economists agree that a default would plunge us back into a deep recession.

Here are some of the troubling impacts of the shutdown on some of our nation's poorest children:

Nearly nine million infants, pregnant women and children are at risk of losing food benefits.

53 percent of all infants born in the U.S. are fed through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), which is without federal funding due to the shutdown. 8.9 million low-income pregnant women, recent mothers and their children under five rely on the program's supplemental vouchers for healthy food, infant formula and other necessities. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that state funds and contingency funds would only be able to cover the month of October. Already some programs are closing their doors. In Utah, roughly 65,000 recipients of WIC have lost the most basic food assistance, including costly infant formula to feed their hungry babies. WIC offices across the state won't be re-opening until the government shutdown is ended. And in Iowa, the program only has enough funds to remain open until October 10th, after which it will no longer be able to issue food benefit checks.

More than 7,000 young children shut out of Head Start. As of Friday, October 4th, seven Head Start programs in six states (AL, CT, FL, GA, SC and MS) were closed, leaving 7,195 of our nation's most vulnerable children without access to Head Start's early education and health services, and leaving their parents scrambling to find other child care arrangements. They include:

- o Connecticut's Action for Bridgeport Community Development, which serves 1,019 children.
- o Mississippi's Five County Child Development Program, which serves 900 children.
- o Alabama's Talladega Clay Randolph Child Care Corp., which serves 898 children.
- o Florida's Capital Area Community Action Agency, which serves 378 children.
- o Georgia's Ninth District Opportunity Inc., which serves 2,153 children.

These have now reopened thanks to the generosity of John and Laura Arnold who recently pledged \$10 million to keep Head Start doors open for the month of October. If the government does not reopen by November 1, additional Head Start programs serving more than 86,000 children in 41 states and one U.S. Territory stand to lose access to Head Start funding.

These cuts to Head Start come on top of sequestration, which in fiscal year 2013 alone cut 57,000 children from the program.

Some low income families may lose Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Funding for TANF does not require annual appropriations, and so ordinarily would not be affected by the government shutdown. This year however, TANF legislation needed to be reauthorized by September 30. Since that renewal was held up along with the spending bill, states are not receiving their October federal funds. The federal government has let states know that they can use leftover funds from previous years. Most states will continue to provide benefits. However, at least one state, Arizona, decided to stop TANF payments to 5,200 families out of the 16,300 families on its TANF caseload, who receive an average benefit of \$207 a month.

Children of the 800,000 furloughed federal employees may suffer if the furlough lasts too long.

The federal government estimates that more than 800,000 workers are being furloughed. In addition, some state or local government employees paid with federal funds are being sent home. For example, in Arkansas nearly 1,000 state employees were furloughed. The current government shutdown comes on top of the unpaid furloughs that many federal employees have been forced to take over the past six months due to sequestration. The longer the shutdown lasts, the more furloughed employees who will experience problems paying bills and providing for their families.

Life-saving medical treatment may be unavailable for children with serious illnesses. For every week that the government shutdown continues, the National Institutes of Health estimates that 30 children—10 with cancer—will not be able to begin their clinical trials.

State Shutdown of Other Critical Services Imminent. States use the \$1.7 billion Social Services Block Grant for child abuse and neglect services, child care, and other important family services. Due to the shutdown, states are not receiving their October funds and may have to close some programs if they do not have alternative funds.