



children's defense fund

Leave No Child Behind®

February 2, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the Children's Defense Fund, I urge Congress to ensure all children and their families are stably housed during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. COVID-19 has exacerbated the nation's affordable housing crisis—the result of a long history of racist housing policy including chronic underinvestment—the burden of which falls disproportionately on Black and Latino children. The emergency relief passed in December—which provided \$25 billion in emergency rental assistance and extended the federal eviction moratorium—was a critical short-term step to protect the millions of families with children who are behind on their rent, but more must be done to ensure that these families emerge from the pandemic free from back rent and the looming threat of eviction.

Specifically, we urge Congress to provide \$30 billion in additional emergency rental assistance; provide \$28 billion in new funding for long-term housing assistance; provide \$8 billion in new funding to serve the unhoused; invest \$44 billion in the country's affordable housing supply; and further extend, strengthen, and enforce the national eviction moratorium.

The Children's Defense Fund makes these asks as a steering committee member of *Opportunity Starts at Home*, a campaign led by national [organizations](#) from a variety of sectors, including health, education, civil rights, food security, environmental protection, faith, municipal governance, child welfare, criminal justice, anti-poverty, and more. Achieving CDF's mission depends on ensuring every child has access to stable, affordable and healthy homes. Based on new estimates by NLIHC, [renters owe \\$57 billion in back rent](#) with an average of \$5,600 in back rent for each household that is behind on their monthly rent and utilities. A wave of evictions and homelessness would disproportionately put children's lives at risk—according to a study of renters in Milwaukee, families with children are more likely to receive an eviction judgment.

To ensure housing stability for children during the pandemic Congress must:

- **Provide at least \$30 billion in emergency rental and utility assistance, as included in President Biden's recent relief proposal.** A federal eviction moratorium alone is not strong enough to ensure that families with children can stay in their homes and back rent is still

piling up for many families who have lost income because of the pandemic. The moratorium must be paired with emergency rental and utility assistance so that renters do not fall off a financial cliff once back-rent is owed. New estimates suggest [at least \\$30 billion in additional emergency rental](#) and utility assistance will be necessary to keep families in their homes after the pandemic.

- **Provide at least \$8 billion in new funding for Emergency Solutions Grants.** Additional funds are needed for unhoused children and families who are at increased risk of exposure to COVID-19. These funds are needed to help people living in encampments and congregate shelters move to safe short- or long-term housing.
- **Provide at least \$28 billion for 5-year funding of 500,000 new housing vouchers.** Congress must look beyond the short-term crisis and expand long-term federal rental assistance so families with children can withstand future crises. Housing vouchers offer this type of long-term support, but the program is severely underfunded—[only 1 in 4 eligible households with children actually receive federal assistance](#). Investing in 500,000 new vouchers specifically targeted at families with children would provide long-term housing stability to these families and serve as a strong down payment on President Biden’s plan to provide vouchers to every eligible household.
- **Provide at least \$44 billion for the national Housing Trust Fund.** These resources are needed to help states and localities expand the supply of long-term affordable housing solutions for unhoused families that have transitioned into non-congregate settings, including hotels and motels during the pandemic. These resources will ensure that families who have received housing assistance during the pandemic are not pushed into homelessness when the pandemic ends.
- **Further extending, strengthening, and enforcing the federal eviction moratorium.** Congress should extend the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) eviction moratorium through the end of the public health emergency. The moratorium should also be improved to automatically apply to all renters and have universal protection with strong federal enforcement of the moratorium for renters to file complaints against landlords who violate the moratorium.
- **Protecting Renters.** Congress should also ensure renters cannot be evicted for back rent accumulated during the pandemic, provide renters a reasonable time to repay back rent accumulated during the pandemic, prohibit late fees and penalties, and prevent evictions from being reported to consumer agencies.

The wellbeing of millions of children depends on swift action from Congress to address the ongoing housing crisis. If we can expand on any of these recommendations or provide more information about the urgent needs of children and families, please do not hesitate to contact CDF’s Interim Policy Director, Kathleen King (kking@childrensdefense.org) and our team can assist you. Thank you for your leadership.

For our children,



The Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson
President/CEO

CC: The Honorable Sherrod Brown
The Honorable Pat Toomey
The Honorable Maxine Waters
The Honorable Patrick McHenry
The Honorable David E. Price
The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
The Honorable Jack Reed
The Honorable Susan Collins