

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 18, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

As you begin budget negotiations, we write to urge you to increase the discretionary budget caps mandated by The Budget Control Act of 2011 such that Congress may continue to prioritize funding for significant investments targeted to help the millions of American working families—affordable housing, affordable, high-quality child care, and investments in a vibrant clean energy economy.

In April 2019, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced that Congressional leadership had agreed to begin negotiating a new two-year agreement to raise the budget caps mandated by the 2011 Budget Control Act. In making this announcement, Leader McConnell announced that he is, “hoping this will be the beginning of a bipartisan agreement, which will be necessary in order to have an orderly appropriations process, not only this year, but next year as well.”¹

We are encouraged by this announcement, and we believe it presents a critical opportunity to target additional investments to help the millions of Americans struggling to get by in today’s economy. In 2017, more than 17 percent of children – most in working families – lived in families with income below the official poverty line.²

Two essential components of families’ economic stability, parents’ ability to work, and children’s healthy development are stable, affordable housing and high-quality, affordable child care. High-quality, affordable child care helps parents get and keep a job, gives children a strong start, and strengthens our economy in both the short- and long-term. Research shows high-

¹Politico, “McConnell says he and Pelosi will launch talks on 2-year budget caps deal,” Jennifer Scholtes and Caitlin Emma, April 9, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/04/09/mcconnell-pelosi-budget-caps-1264093>

² United States Census Bureau, “Income and Poverty in the United States: 2017,” Kayla Fontenot, Jessica Semega, Melissa Kollar, September 12, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/demo/p60-263.pdf>

quality child care programs have a positive impact both on the children that are served—helping to put them on a path of healthy development and learning—and on families as a whole. Parents with child care subsidies are more likely to be employed and to hold stable jobs. Similarly, housing assistance has profound impacts on the people it serves, including families, seniors and Americans with disabilities. Research shows that healthy, stable and affordable housing improves a resident’s health, a child’s cognitive development and educational attainment, and a tenant’s employment incomes.^[1]

Child care and housing assistance are currently the largest discretionary, non-entitlement programs targeted to help low-income, working families. Yet, only a small fraction of families who qualify for federal housing or child care assistance receive it.³ Due to years of underinvestment, far too many families cannot find and afford high-quality child care arrangements and live in housing that is substandard, unstable, and located in neighborhoods with limited opportunities.

Following the Fiscal Year 2018 budget negotiations, Congressional leadership came together in a bipartisan fashion to broker a deal that secured funding for historic new investments that have made a difference in the lives of American families. In particular, the 2018 budget deal significantly increased investments in child care and housing. The FY 2018 funding increase for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) was the largest increase ever enacted, and rental assistance programs received the largest expansion in more than a decade.

The House Committee on Appropriations has already moved again to increase investments in these critical programs in the appropriations bills passed out of the committee for the 2020 fiscal year. House Appropriators invested an additional \$4 billion in child care and early education programs and at least \$5.9 billion in housing programs.

These investments—while critical and robust—are still not enough to fully meet the needs of all children and families eligible for these programs, and Congress must do more to make significant investments that serve the pressing, national need. Long-term underinvestment in child care and housing assistance has resulted in the programs serving only a small fraction of those who need help. Currently, only 1 in 6 children eligible for child care assistance⁴—and 1 in 5 families with children eligible for housing assistance⁵ — receive it.

In addition to the pressing needs of affordable housing and child care, any budget caps increase should include significant new investments to tackle the climate crisis, and those investments should be targeted to both reduce emissions and help working families. Congress should dramatically increase funding for programs that that would reduce the cost of electricity for low-income families through energy efficient building retrofits like the Weatherization Assistance Program.

^[1] The National Low Income Housing Coalition, “The Gap,” March 2019, https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/Gap-Report_2019.pdf.

³ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Child Care and Housing: Big Expenses With Too Little Help Available,” Douglas Rice, Stephanie Schmit, Hannah Matthews, April 26, 2019, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housinfovertg/child-care-and-housing-big-expenses-with-too-little-help-available>

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

Congress should also provide transit systems with additional funding to purchase electric buses, which would dramatically improve the air quality in low-income neighborhoods and improve the quality of public transit. Finally, Congress should also invest in opportunities for rural communities to benefit from a transition to a clean energy economy by increasing funding for the Rural Energy for America Program. House appropriators have recognized the urgency of these investments by proposing an additional \$672 million for the Environmental Protection Agency and \$273 million for energy efficiency and renewable energy programs for the 2020 fiscal year.

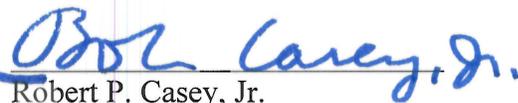
In this year's budget caps deal, therefore, we urge you to respond to the most pressing issues faced by working families by providing for sizable increases, such that Congressional Appropriators are able to significantly strengthen investments in child care and housing assistance, and make significant down payments to tackle the climate crisis. Specifically, we ask that the budget deal provide significant funding for child care, housing assistance, and clean energy, energy efficiency and clean transit programs over the two year period.

A budget is a statement of our values, and Congress must value investments in our most pressing priorities, primarily the needs of struggling families and their children and the existential threat posed by the climate crisis. We look forward to working with you to support meaningful expansions of these critical supports for families with children, which will pay long-term benefits to our nation.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



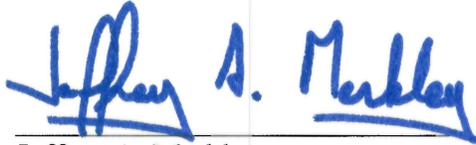
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator


Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator


Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator


Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator


Chris Van Hollen
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