

July 30, 2014

Hon. Shaun Donovan
Director, U.S. Office of Management and Budget
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Director Donovan:

Congratulations on your confirmation as director of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. We write to urge you to make full use of OMB's potential to improve the lives of America's children and youth.

Children and youth face real problems in America today, in large part because they are an afterthought in federal policymaking. Federal investments like Social Security and Medicare have proven very effective in reducing poverty among seniors, but today nearly one-fourth of children live in poverty. More than one-in-five lives in a home struggling with hunger, but legislation adopted with bipartisan support in the U.S. House of Representatives would make it harder for children and youth to get the food they need. From immigration to health care, children's priorities are not often priorities in Washington.

But you can change that, by employing the old business maxim that "you measure what matters." The president's annual budget submission is required by law to include special itemized accountings of priority investments, like drug control efforts, federal agency inspectors general, and weather forecasting. But despite the fact that both policymakers and voters alike place a high priority on the well-being and success of children, there is no official accounting of federal investments in America's children. The task is not an insurmountable one – First Focus, a small national nonprofit with limited resources, has published such a "Children's Budget" for years. But this is no substitute for an official measure offering much-needed transparency about the impact of fiscal proposals on investments in children. We ask that you measure what matters, by submitting an official Children's Budget as part of President Obama's federal fiscal year 2016 budget proposal.

OMB is also uniquely positioned to make children and youth a budget priority, by setting a national target for investments in children and youth. Voters want to invest more than 30 percent of the federal budget in children, but today, kids' share of the budget is only 8 percent. Yet there is precedent for bipartisan progress. Both President Bill Clinton and President George W. Bush used the president's budget to advance a successful effort to double funding for the National Institutes of Health. President Obama has consistently made children a priority in his annual budget submissions, holding the line or even proposing increased investments in children, even as his budgets have proposed overall spending reductions. We ask that you consider institutionalizing this commitment to children and youth, by using the fiscal year 2016 budget to begin a process by which the budget commits to a one percentage point increase in the children and youth's share of the federal budget over a specific timeframe. This is doable, as the Administration has proposed an expansion of early childhood funding and, we would hope, commitments to reauthorize the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, the Child Nutrition Act, Express Lane Enrollment for children's health care, Title I funding for local schools, and measures to reduce the national crisis of child poverty.

Finally, OMB can put children's interests at the center of fiscal and policy debates, by consistently including "children and youth impact assessments" in OMB's Statements of Administration Policy (SAPs). The Obama Administration has used SAPs to this effect in the past. For example, a recent SAP on tax legislation (H.R. 4453) contrasted congressional support for a proposals to extend corporate tax breaks with Congress' failure to act on legislation extending the Child Tax Credit and other family tax policies. We ask that you make this focus on children and youth the standard, by ensuring that, when applicable, SAPs include an assessment of legislation's impact on children and youth.

We fully recognize that children and youth cannot be the Administration's only priority, but the simple fact is that children and youth have been an important Administration priority. Acting now to systematize this focus on the best interests of children and youth could ensure for decades to come that children and youth will be a higher priority in federal legislative and policy debates.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these ideas, and we thank you for your time and your attention to OMB's role in building a brighter future for America's children and youth.

Sincerely,

First Focus
National Title I Association
Public Advocacy for Kids
National Child Abuse Coalition
Child Welfare League of America
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
School-Based Health Alliance
Campaign for Youth Justice
National Head Start Association