

July 15, 2024

Director Shalanda Young
Office of Management and Budget
Executive Office of the President
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Young,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to encourage the administration to increase support for essential programs that prevent and respond to violence against children globally in the FY2026 President's Budget Request. We request a meeting to discuss priorities for Fiscal Year 2026 and better understand how your administration intends to meet the needs of children affected by violence globally.

We are encouraged by the prospect of the U.S. government's high-level participation and engagement at the first-ever [Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children](#). Importantly, the need for this meeting has been generated, in part, by the data describing the extraordinarily high levels and consequences of violence against children obtained from the Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS). The VACS are led by national governments and developed and implemented with U.S. financial assistance and technical assistance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Data from the VACS have catalyzed positive policy and programmatic change for children in every country that has undergone a VACS and inform U.S. foreign assistance programs and implementation. Through innovative efforts like the VACS, the U.S. has established itself as a global leader in protecting children from exploitation and violence.

We urge the Biden administration to send a strong message to other UN Member States through robust commitments and investments to accelerate progress toward ending violence against children globally, which is reaching catastrophic levels.

Half of the world's children – nearly one billion – are victims of violence annually. Violence against children includes physical, emotional, and sexual violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. This global public health crisis is exacerbated by the rise of technology-facilitated violence and the harmful use of artificial intelligence, residual effects of the pandemic, a growing number of global conflicts, unprecedented rates of forced migration and displacement, and the worsening climate crisis and environmental degradation. This polycrisis threatens the safety and well-being of children around the world and must be met with urgency and attention.

- In 2022, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) fielded over 32 million reports of child sexual abuse material from across the globe, an 87% increase since 2019.
- Twenty percent of children in some countries were subjected to child sexual exploitation and abuse online in the past year.

- Over 10.5 children worldwide have lost a caregiver due to the pandemic and are at increased risk of child marriage, child labor, and other forms of violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect.
- 1 in 6 of the world’s children, approximately 468 million children, live in a conflict zone. These children are at risk of sexual violence and recruitment by armed groups.
- An estimated 850 million children - 1 in 3 worldwide - live in areas where at least four climate and environmental shocks overlap and erode development progress and deepen child deprivations.

These children’s well-being and survival must not be determined by their perseverance and resilience alone. Vulnerable children need protection and access to essential services that keep them safe now and sustain them long-term. A growing body of research has shown that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) impact the healthy brain development of children, affecting their lifelong health, well-being, and future education and employment opportunities. Repeated exposure to violence in childhood can impede a child’s ability to succeed in school and increase the likelihood that they become a victim or perpetrator of violence.

Working alongside other nations and civil society organizations, U.S. foreign assistance plays a vital role in tackling issues like child trafficking, exploitative and forced child labor, and sexual exploitation of children. The U.S. has also been a leader in protecting children and youth in situations of armed conflict, preventing child, early, and forced marriage, and ending harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and cutting.

To ensure the continued leadership and influence of the U.S. in the protection of children from violence globally, we request the following:

CATEGORY	TOPLINE REQUEST AMOUNT
VULNERABLE CHILDREN ACCOUNT	No less than \$35 million for the Vulnerable Children account , which works to protect the most vulnerable children from violence, exploitation and abuse, support their early development and keep them in nurturing, protective and permanent family care.
DEPARTMENT OF STATE CHILD PROTECTION COMPACT PARTNERSHIPS	At least \$15 million for the Department of State’s Child Protection Compact (CPC) Partnerships , which are multi-year commitments between the State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP) and partner governments to bolster efforts to combat child labor, sex trafficking and online sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

<p>EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS & ADDRESSING CHILD MARRIAGE</p>	<p>No less than \$30 million to be dedicated to the implementation of a coordinated and comprehensive effort to end child marriage and meet the needs of married girls globally in alignment with the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls.</p>
<p>VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN & YOUTH SURVEYS (VACS)</p>	<p>At least \$10 million in new funding to support Violence Against Children & Youth Surveys (VACS) to create a consistent, reliable funding source for the VACS, which are nationally representative household surveys that capture the magnitude, nature, and consequences of violence against children, adolescents, and youth. This funding would allow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide essential technical assistance to VACS implementing countries and for the continued generation of critical data to inform U.S. foreign assistance implementation.</p>
<p>BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL LABOR AFFAIRS (ILAB)</p>	<p>No less than \$118 million for the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) to help improve working conditions and labor standards for workers worldwide by carrying out its statutory mandates and international responsibilities, including promoting the elimination of the worst forms of child labor and forced labor.</p>
<p>HSI CHILD EXPLOITATION INVESTIGATIONS UNIT (CEIU)</p>	<p>No less than \$30 million for Homeland Security Investigations' (HSI) Child Exploitation Investigations Unit (CEIU) to support and increase its investigations related to the sexual exploitation of children, including the production and distribution of child sexual abuse materials, collaboration between domestic and international law enforcement and the private sector and victim identification.</p>

We also urge the U.S. government to develop and implement a comprehensive and coordinated strategy built upon evidence-based practices and adopt common metrics and indicators to monitor progress toward preventing, addressing, and ending all forms of violence against children and youth across the various agencies and accounts contributing funds to this work.

We look forward to working with OMB and the Biden-Harris administration to advance the above priorities for FY2026 and discuss our recommendations at your earliest convenience. We encourage you to contact Leila Milani (lmilani@futureswithoutviolence.org) or Chrissy Hart

(chrissy@togetherforgirls.org) with your availability to discuss these priorities together in pursuit of a world where all children are safe, protected, and thriving.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
Bread for the World
ChildFund International
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Disability Rights International
End OSEAC Survivor's Council
Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice
Feminist Majority Foundation
First Focus on Children
Futures Without Violence
GEIA
Global Campaign for Education - US
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
International Justice Mission
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Last Mile4
Mona Foundation
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC)
Oxfam America
Strategy for Humanity
Together for Girls
UNICEF USA
Union for Reform Judaism
United States International Council on Disabilities
Women of Reform Judaism
Women Watch Afrika
Women's Refugee Commission
World Hope International
World Relief
World Vision

ANNEX: FUNDING REQUESTS AND JUSTIFICATIONS

- **\$35 million for the Vulnerable Children account**, which supports USAID’s Children in Adversity office to coordinate assistance to orphans and other vulnerable children. Resources for the account help to implement the United States Government Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity (APCCA) whole-of-government strategy to build strong beginnings through early childhood development, support for children living outside family-based care, and protection for children from violence, abuse, and neglect.

***Justification:** A modest expansion of funding to \$35 million in FY26 would allow the Children in Adversity Office to bolster the integration of early childhood interventions into new and existing foreign assistance programs serving vulnerable children and their families, per the direction of the Global Child Thrive Act. This level of investment would also further programming focused on online and offline child safeguarding initiatives among U.S. government personnel and partners and strengthening social service workforce capacity.*

- **\$15 million for the Department of State’s Child Protection Compact (CPC) Partnership**, which is multi-year commitments between the State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (JTIP) and partner governments to bolster efforts to combat child labor, sex trafficking and online sexual exploitation and abuse of children. The CPC Partnerships support the sustainable development of partner governments’ capacity to hold perpetrators of child sex and labor trafficking accountable under the law, provide comprehensive services for child trafficking survivors, and expand child trafficking prevention and awareness. In its April 6, 2023 report, titled Human Trafficking: Department of State Collaborates with Partner Governments on Child Protection Compacts but Should Strengthen Oversight (GAO–23–105390), GAO recommended that the Department should strengthen oversight of the compacts, specifically over the contributions of partner country governments to current and future compacts.

***Justification:** The Philippines, a global hotspot for online sexual exploitation and abuse of children (OSEAC), was party to a CPC Partnership from 2017-2021, which improved the government of the Philippines' capacity to prevent and respond to OSEAC and child labor trafficking through improved investigations and increased prosecutions of offenders, enhanced protections for survivors, and strengthened prevention and local level response for vulnerable children in the Philippines. An FY26 allocation of at least \$15 million for CPC Partnerships will allow for additional compacts to support governments around the world that currently lack the infrastructure and capacity to respond to similar forms of child trafficking. Also, in the April 6, 2023 report, titled Human Trafficking: Department of State Collaborates with Partner Governments on Child Protection Compacts but Should Strengthen Oversight (GAO–23–105390), GAO recommended that the Department should strengthen oversight of the compacts, specifically over the contributions of partner country governments to current and future compacts.*

- **\$30 million for the implementation of a coordinated and comprehensive effort to end child early and forced marriage.**

***Justification:** These increased funds include a new allotment of \$7,000,000 to the U.S. commitment to the joint UN Global Program to End Child Marriage, which has generated*

remarkable results addressing child marriage in 12 of the highest prevalence or high-burden countries. Some notable results from the program in 2022 show:

- In Nepal, 57,000 girls participated in life skills education, with 64 percent of the girls aged 15-19 years old reporting to have increased self-efficacy and that they can negotiate the delay of marriage and speak up without fear*
- In Sierra Leone, over 60,000 community members participated in dialogues to promote gender equality, including specific sessions engaging men and boys on harmful masculinities and sessions with traditional and religious leaders for consensus-building around ending child marriage.*
- In Ethiopia, over 1,300 local women development groups have been supported to drive change and challenge harmful gender norms in their communities.*
- In Zambia, 1,244 community welfare assistant committees were established with the support of the program, training committee members on case management that reached over 13,000 adolescents with child protection, health, education, and other social services through referrals and follow-ups.*

• **\$10 million to support Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys.** Violence against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS) are nationally representative household surveys of children, adolescents, and youth. The first step in preventing violence against children is gaining a better understanding of its magnitude, nature, and consequences. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides technical and financial support to countries to conduct VACS to measure and better understand girls' and boys' experiences of physical, emotional, and sexual violence.

***Justification:** Before receiving CDC support for a VACS, countries agree to develop a national action plan to address violence based on the survey's findings, which guide program and policy development to prevent violence before it starts. With this reliable evidence, countries can make better decisions using limited resources to develop, launch, and evaluate violence prevention programs and child protection systems. VACS data also informs U.S. foreign assistance programs to support countries' efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children. Each VACS costs an estimated \$3 million, with the CDC completing an average of three surveys each fiscal year. Additional funding is used to support technical assistance and capacity building, conduct additional research using VACS data, strengthen prevention and response efforts, and build the capacities to design, implement, and monitor evidence-based interventions. While VACS have historically been conducted internationally, a U.S. city is currently piloting the first-ever domestic VACS, bringing critical learning from foreign assistance implementation home to improve child well-being in the U.S.*

Data from the VACS have catalyzed positive policy and programmatic change for children in every country that has undergone a VACS and inform U.S. foreign assistance programs and implementation. Funding for CDC technical support for VACS varies yearly and historically has been funded mainly from PEPFAR and USAID (APCCA, CARSI) budgets. This funding source will end in FY26. \$10 million through a budget line directed by the CDC would allow for a consistent, reliable funding source to meet the demand for VACS technical assistance.

• **At least \$118 million for the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB).** ILAB engagement and technical cooperation initiatives have made a critical difference in the lives of close to 2 million children and 185,000 families through education and livelihood support and increased capacity of governments

and other stakeholders to combat child labor and forced labor. ILAB is the only U.S. agency that works to end exploitative child labor. These projects most commonly provide education and life skills to children and youth and give their parents support to allow children to stay in school rather than work. ILAB also reports on consumer products made through forced or child labor and helps to build the capacity of the private sector to address the issue, including companies working in tobacco, rubber, tea, cocoa, sugarcane, cotton, and many other areas.

***Justification:** ILAB accounts for the largest allocation of all U.S. Government spending on efforts to prevent and address violence against children. The requested funding would allow ILAB to continue its work to prevent and respond to exploitative child labor by holding current funding levels, robustly funding technical assistance for worker rights to countries with which the U.S. has trade agreements or preference programs to ensure consistency with expanding U.S. trade commitments, and continue the strong evaluation of programs. ILAB plays a critical role in working to eradicate child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking, including through its research and reporting in its Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor, List of Products Produced by Forced or Indentured Child Labor. The appropriation will support the continued publication of these critical reports, including tracking goods through supply chains and identifying inputs made with child and forced labor.*

• **At least \$30 million for Homeland Security Investigations' Child Exploitation Investigations Unit (CEIU).** The CEIU sits within Homeland Security Investigations' Cyber Crimes Center and focuses on investigations related to the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, including the production and distribution of child sexual abuse materials. CEIU's initiatives include: Operation Predator, which targets offenders, including those that produce child sexual abuse materials; the Virtual Global Taskforce, which supports collaboration between domestic and international law enforcement agencies and private sector partners against online sexual exploitation and abuse; the National Child Victim Identification System, which supports law enforcement's ability to identify victims of sexual exploitation; and the Victim Identification Program, which supports the removal of children who are depicted in child sexual abuse material from harm.

***Justification:** Large-scale international child sexual abuse materials investigations have historically interdicted some of the most violent perpetrators of child sexual abuse and exploitation around the globe, including those that facilitate and participate in the live-streaming of sexual abuse of children. These cases often require close coordination with foreign law enforcement and frequently depend on their capacity, which is unavailable or limited in many cases. Increased funding would allow for the CEIU to respond to growing rates of online sexual exploitation and abuse of children, improve coordination with and provide direct support to international law enforcement, and increase online sexual exploitation and abuse of children investigations, resulting in additional victims being identified, removed from harmful situations and referred to the services and support they need.*