Loving Creator, help and heal all impacted by the coronavirus: patients, healthcare and aid workers, families and communities.

**ACTION**

Our action this month will be to write our U.S. Representative to express gratitude for Congress’ swift action to address the impact of COVID-19 virus within the U.S. and internationally, and to ask them to cosponsor the Global Child Thrive Act (H.R. 4864) to help vulnerable children introduced by Reps. Castro (D-TX) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA) or thank them if they already cosponsored the bill, asking them to take the next step to support it.

**LASER TALK**

Since 1990, U.S. international aid has saved nearly 100 million children. But children need to do more than survive; they need to thrive. Worldwide it’s estimated that 31 million children have been forcibly displaced from their homes. More than half of the world’s estimated 22 million refugees are children. These children will have their development disrupted and grow smaller brains than children who have not experienced the trauma of fleeing violence. Early Childhood Development or ECD is a way to help migrant and refugee children, and all children, thrive despite challenges brought on by forced migration and poverty. Currently, the U.S. government doesn’t integrate ECD activities into international programs for children and families. Our Catholic faith compels us to care for life from conception to natural death. That means giving each child a strong foundation from which to reach his or her God-given potential.

Will you join Reps. Castro (D-TX) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA) lead sponsors of H.R. 4864 or Sens. Coons (D-DE) and Blunt (R-MO) lead sponsors of S. 2715 in cosponsoring the Global Child Thrive Act directing the administration to integrate Early Childhood Development activities into international child-focused programs, thereby improving the lives of vulnerable children?

**BACKGROUND**

The recent COVID-19 virus outbreak has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. Catholic Relief Services and our wide network of trusted partners are ramping up global efforts to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

A pandemic like COVID-19 is disrupting the lives of families worldwide and has the potential to increase the adversities faced by vulnerable children living overseas. With prevention practices and community education, the effects of this virus can be lessened. Over the past eight years, CRS has become a leader in child-focused programming. By integrating Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions into our programming for young children and their families, CRS has been able to multiply positive outcomes for children in adversity — like migrants and refugees, and those suffering from malnutrition, living in poverty. Based on new research and our first-hand experience, we are calling on the U.S. government to follow suit and become a global leader. As the biggest donor of foreign assistance worldwide, the United States has a critical role to play in improving the lives of the world’s most vulnerable children. The passage of the Global Child Thrive Act would greatly mitigate the impact of future pandemics and disasters on the poorest families.
How do humanitarian emergencies impact children? Catholic Relief Services’ humanitarian staff respond to emergencies across the globe during times of need. In the context of humanitarian emergencies related to forced displacement, CRS and our partners provide refugees and displaced people with shelter, food and the clean water and sanitation they need. CRS also seeks to create sustainable solutions for the harder to address issues of trauma and grief that migrants and refugees experience. For young children, this early intervention is incredibly important because their brains are growing rapidly, and the toxic stress caused by poverty, malnutrition and forced migration can negatively impact that growth. In fact, studies have found that forced migration during early childhood was significantly associated with poor cognitive well-being later in life. CRS utilizes ECD interventions in child-friendly spaces to help migrant children mitigate the impact of their trauma and build their resilience. In addition to healthy snacks and age-appropriate games, child-friendly spaces offer education, tutoring and grief counseling to children, who may be unable to verbalize their emotions. Further, because healthy child development also requires a nurturing family environment, CRS supports parents with parent training, job opportunities and psychosocial support.

According to CRS humanitarian staff, “ECD changes the trajectory of children’s lives. The longer children are out of school, the more likely they will never go back. ECD addresses issues of grief, toxic stress and trauma so that these wounds do not permanently harm the adults they will grow up to become.” Under our world’s current circumstances, ensuring the conditions for vulnerable children to survive and thrive is critical. The Global Child Thrive Act, if passed by Congress and signed into law, could be an important part of this effort. The Global Child Thrive Act would integrate Early Childhood Development into development and humanitarian/emergency programs serving vulnerable children and their families, helping them recover from the COVID-19 virus and building their resilience to future emergencies and trauma.

TAKE ACTION: Write a letter to your U.S. Representative

1. Go to the website of your U.S. Representative and see how they want you to write them (e.g. by filling out an online form or by email. If you don’t have a smartphone or laptop with you, you can address your letter to: Rep. __________, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

2. Introduce yourself: Provide personal information to root yourself in the community (I am active in my local parish, I volunteer at our local food bank, etc.) and briefly share why this issue matters to you. Share connections to your faith, activities you’re involved with in your community, parish or diocese to help children and families, etc. Share if you’ve visited a related CRS program.

3. Find something for which to thank the Representative: Thank them for their service in Congress and share how you are grateful for Congress’ action to begin providing funding internationally to address the COVID-19 virus.

4. Make the ask: Ask your U.S. Representative to cosponsor the Global Child Thrive Act (H.R. 4864) introduced by Reps. Castro (D-TX) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA). If your Representative is already a cosponsor, thank them and ask them to take a next step in their support of the legislation (e.g. encouraging other members of their state delegation to cosponsor or speaking to the key decision-makers on the House Foreign Affairs Committee to urge consideration of the bill on the House suspension calendar).

5. Provide some background to support your argument: In your own words, share why it is important to integrate Early Childhood Development activities across international child-focused programs to multiply positive outcomes for vulnerable children. Visit the body of this Action Sheet to support your argument.

6. Repeat the ‘ask’, say thank you, and request a response: Leave your name, address, phone number and email address so they can get back to you with their decision.