

Action Sheet

JULY 2020

God of love, we pray that we see more clearly the needs of children who often go without the food, nutrients and adequate care they deserve. We pray that in solidarity, we act in tangible ways today to uphold their dignity and see them thrive.

ACTION

In order to continue to advance that Global Child Thrive Act this Congress, our action sheet action this month will be to write our U.S. Representatives urging them to cosponsor or thanking them if they have already cosponsored the Global Child Thrive Act (H.R. 4864), introduced by Reps. Castro (D-TX) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA). If they are already a cosponsor, ask your representative to take the next step in supporting the bill by urging the leadership of the House Foreign Affairs Committee to have the bill taken up on the House Suspension calendar.

August congressional recess is approaching, which means members of Congress and their staff are focused on connecting with constituents back home. Therefore, as part of the actions this month, we invite Chapter congressional liaisons to start contacting congressional offices to request virtual meetings with the chapter.

LASER TALK

More than half of the world's estimated 26 million refugees are children. Globally, the number of children who face a lifetime of developmental challenges caused by malnutrition exceeds 149 million—more than twice the total number of children in the United States. According to the World Food Program, COVID-19 may push an additional 10 million children into acute malnutrition.

The good news is that since 1990, U.S. international aid has saved nearly 100 million children. But children need to do more than survive; they need to thrive. That's why investing in Early Childhood Development, or ECD, is so important. Singing, reading and playing with colorful objects stimulates young minds, but the U.S. government doesn't integrate ECD activities into international programs for children. Our faith compels us to care for all life which means giving each child a strong foundation from which to reach their 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 ECD activities into international child-focused programs? Passage would greatly mitigate the impact of future pandemics and disasters on the poorest families.

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 continues to devastate families and communities across the United States and world. While needs increase in the United States, we must also be deeply concerned about the impact around the world, where fragile or non-existent health systems mean families and their children face daunting barriers to basic needs and services. With the support of the Catholic community in the United States, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and its partners are working tirelessly to respond to COVID-19, focusing on supporting high risk populations like vulnerable children.

Hunger, Malnutrition and the Global Child Thrive Act: According to a report published in *The Lancet*, “a staggering 43 percent of children under five years of age—an estimated 250 million—living in low- and middle-income countries are at risk of suboptimal development caused by poverty, nutritional deficiencies, and inadequate learning opportunities.” Malnutrition stunts children’s growth and impairs their cognitive and physical development. It is the underlying cause of 45 percent of all preventable deaths worldwide of children under five, according to UNICEF. Therefore, to address global hunger, we must address malnutrition. It is not enough for children to simply have access to food; they need the right kind of nutritious food with sufficient vitamins, minerals and protein, combined with nurturing care to absorb key nutrients and properly develop. In fact, good nutrition combined with nurturing care has a far greater positive impact than good nutrition alone. Incorporating ECD activities into U.S. government-funded food security and nutrition programs, such as helping caregivers to use mealtime as a place to bond with children, would multiply positive outcomes for children. Given this research, if we want to end child malnutrition, we should promote ECD. During the time of COVID-19, ECD is more important than ever. Given the prevalence of underlying health conditions such as HIV infection, poor nutrition and limited access to quality health services, mortality rates due to COVID-19 may be much higher in low-income countries. Experts are sounding the alarm that the additional stressors caused by COVID 19 can worsen family tensions and further impede caregivers’ ability to properly care for their loved ones. ECD, integrated into programming, will support children’s holistic well-being and strengthen the foundation of their development, lessening the worst impacts of the pandemic.

The Global Child Thrive Act would integrate Early Childhood Development (ECD) into development and humanitarian programs serving vulnerable children and their families without requiring additional federal funding. It would help children recover from the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and build their resilience to future emergencies and trauma. Moreover, the holistic nature of the bill means it connects to many aspects of care for children. For example, it promotes access to clean water and hygiene practices at home, which are the primary tools in stopping the spread of COVID-19. It elevates the necessity of providing safe, family-based care for children, including for those who are at risk of losing parental care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, it promotes psychosocial support and positive reinforcement, which will be crucial for young children experiencing the loss of a parent, isolation at home due to quarantines, malnutrition and magnified economic household stress, which are expected to increase as a result of this pandemic.

To reflect on and learn more about the impact of good nutrition on children, watch a video from our Lead the Way YouTube playlist ([English video](#) or [Spanish video](#)).

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, by email, and/or snail mail). 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 (e.g., 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 parish or diocese to help children and families, etc. Share if you’ve visited a related CRS program.
- 3. Thank your U.S. Representative:** Express gratitude for Congress’ action to address COVID-19 and support funding for vulnerable families and communities around the world in one of the first COVID emergency packages.
- 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. speaking to leadership of 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, particularly as it relates to the current pandemic.
- 6. Repeat the ‘ask’, say thank you, and request a response:** Leave your name, address, phone number and email address so the office can get back to you with their decision.