

Action Sheet

MAY 2020

Loving Creator, you entrust us to be stewards of your creation. May we renew our commitment to you and our neighbor with love and action.

ACTION

Our Action Sheet action this month will be to write a letter to the editor that focuses on asking your U.S. Representative to support and co-sponsor the Global Child Thrive Act (H.R. 4864). The Global Child Thrive Act, introduced in the House by Reps. Castro (D-TX) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA), will mandate that Early Childhood Development interventions be integrated into existing U.S. government international programs focused on young children and their families. Doing this will ensure U.S. foreign aid programs will be as effective as possible in helping young children thrive without calling for additional funding, especially during times such as this current global crisis.

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. COVID-19 is disrupting the lives of families worldwide and can increase the adversities faced by vulnerable children globally.

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 and makes international programs more effective. Currently, the U.S. government doesn't integrate ECD activities into international programs for children. Our Catholic faith compels us to care for all life, and that 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 families and communities 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 mitigating the risks facing the highest-risk populations, like vulnerable children, elderly people and people with disabilities. We are supporting refugees and other people uprooted from their communities, many of whom live in densely congested living spaces with limited access to water, health services and sanitation. With prevention practices and community education, the destructive impact of this

virus can be lessened. Where possible, CRS is adapting existing programs to continue to meet people’s basic needs without spreading the virus during delivery of critical assistance. This includes teaching communities about the importance of handwashing and physical distancing, providing nutritious food as well as clean water and soap.

COVID-19 and the Global Child Thrive Act: For young children, early intervention during emergencies 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. By integrating Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions into programs 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 and living in poverty. 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. In addition, utilization of the health system for critical lifesaving interventions such as pediatric AIDS treatment and routine immunizations could drop sharply. The death or illness of a caregiver, the loss of income, rising tensions within a household combined with social isolation—all can reduce supervision, family protection and responsive caregiving in affected families. During the pandemic and in its wake, vulnerable children may experience heightened levels of neglect, mental or psychological distress, stalled educational progress, child labor, separation from loved ones and social exclusion.

The Global Child Thrive Act would integrate Early Childhood Development into development and humanitarian programs serving vulnerable children and their families without requiring additional funding—helping children recover from the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and building their resilience to future emergencies and trauma. Moreover, the holistic nature of the bill means it connects to many aspects of care. For example, it promotes access to clean water and hygiene practices, which are the primary tools in stopping the spread of COVID-19. It elevates the necessity of providing safe, family-based care for children without family care, including those who may lose parental care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, it promotes psychosocial support, which will be crucial for young children experiencing violence, traumatic events, and economic hardships which are expected to increase as a result of this pandemic.

TAKE ACTION: Write a Letter to the Editor

1. Find the local newspaper you will write to: To learn what is required for letters to the editor, Google the following: “(Name of the paper) letters to the editor guidelines.” Note the number of words they allow and how a letter is submitted. It may be through their website or by sending it to an email address.

2. Think about the placement of the piece: If you are writing a letter to a larger newspaper, find an article or editorial that provides a good angle for discussing the need to care for vulnerable children amidst this pandemic. If you are writing a smaller local paper, you do not have to reference an article, just write in a way that makes it clear why local readers would care about this issue.

3. Research: Read a few letters to the editor in the newspaper you are targeting to see how they are started and the general tone.

4. Write your letter: Use the guidelines the newspaper has provided, and the information included in this Action Sheet. Share what values or experiences move you to work to support the world’s most vulnerable children and have a member of your chapter provide some edits for your letter.

5. Make sure to include the ask: Express gratitude for Congress’ action to help address the needs of people most vulnerable in the U.S. and around the world amidst this pandemic and urge readers to turn their attention to urging their Representative to co-sponsor and champion the Global Child Thrive Act, **H.R. 4864**, introduced by Reps. by 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 the key decision-makers on the House Foreign Affairs Committee to urge consideration of the bill on the House Suspension Calendar).

6. Report back and celebrate: If your letter is published, let us know by contacting your CRS Community Engagement Manager. Share it on social media. Send it to your members of Congress! If it’s not published, consider sending it to another newspaper.

