

Writing Letters to the Editor: Senate

Global Child Thrive Act (S. 2715)

As missionary disciples, we are called to urgently respond to the needs of migrants and refugees. Today, a staggering 70 million people are currently displaced, many as a result of conflict and violence. Families are forced to flee in search of safety. Children suffer especially from this experience and may have long-term emotional, physical and cognitive setbacks.

ACTION

Write a letter to the editor that focuses on asking your Senators to support and co-sponsor the Global Child Thrive Act, **S. 2715**, introduced by Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Chris Coons (D-DE). This bill will mandate that Early Childhood Development interventions be integrated into the U.S. government's international programs focused on young children and their families; doing this will ensure our foreign aid programs will be as effective as possible in helping young children thrive, without calling for additional funding.

BRIEF OVERVIEW: Why do we need the Global Child Thrive Act?

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 could 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.

We ask our members of Congress to join lead sponsors Reps. Castro (D-TX) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA) of H.R. 4864 or Sens. Coons (D-DE) and Blunt (R-MO), lead sponsors of S. 2715, in cosponsoring and passing 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.

CONNECTIONS TO THE ISSUE OF FORCED MIGRATION

Our work at Catholic Relief Services focuses on the most vulnerable children, helping their families ensure they reach school age healthy and well-nourished, intellectually curious, socially confident and equipped with a solid foundation for life-long learning. Using private funding, CRS invests in ECD to ensure that health and nutrition services, responsive caregiving, safety and security, and opportunities for early learning are available for the most vulnerable children in countries such as Kenya, Malawi and Zambia. We have developed a process for integrating ECD into ongoing programming that reaches children during their first 1,000 days of life up through the age of 8 years old and have implemented that programming in 20 countries around the world, serving 1.36 million children and their families.

For children who have seen the devastation of war and violence in their communities or have been forced to flee their homes due to that violence—their development is severely hindered due to their trauma. In fact, we know more today about the effects of toxic stress on a young brain. For example, the chaos and fear associated with life on the move can directly disrupt a child's brain development given that when a child feels unsafe, his or her brain will spend more time focusing on survival, rather than on new areas of growth and exploration. Children experiencing toxic stress will grow smaller brains with fewer neural connections than children who are not traumatized; they may experience speech or reading delays, and later suffer from depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues. In addition, migrants often have a lack of adequate nutrient intake and

limited access to health care. This can be particularly devastating if children experience these deprivations during key developmental windows, such as the first years of life. Studies have found that forced migration during early childhood was significantly associated with poor cognitive well-being later in life. ECD is a way to help children thrive despite these types of challenges. CRS is supporting children who have been displaced by violence by supporting the creation of classrooms and child-friendly spaces where children can have access to education that brings stability, and opportunities for growth and expression to heal from the trauma they have experienced.

Moving from Surviving to Thriving—A New Approach and Ask for Congress: According to the British medical journal, *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.” Experts now recommend targeting caregivers and children with ECD during the first years of life to ensure children living in adversity do not fall below their potential.

U.S. government efforts to assist children in low income countries have often focused on single areas of vulnerability—for example, HIV or malnutrition or child labor. Although such efforts have produced substantial benefits, this diffused approach has resulted in a fragmented legislative, funding and programmatic response for children. The incorporation of ECD interventions as core components of U.S. government programs across all child-focused sectors would multiply outcomes for children and ensure the most effective use of precious foreign aid resources. The U.S. Government is well-positioned to mobilize around a sensible and strategic global agenda for children because of its diplomatic outreach, significant investments in international development, and technical expertise and research capabilities embedded within key agencies. However, it requires a Congressional directive for the administration to take on Early Childhood Development in a comprehensive, holistic way.

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.

- Do you submit it on the newspaper’s website, or do they provide an email address to use?

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 bill (e.g. children, Early Childhood Development, coverage on refugee camps, global poverty).

- *Example of approach for larger publication:* “I read with interest the article on last evening’s presidential debates. One subject that was missing from the discussion was needed action on ending global poverty ...”

If you are writing a smaller local paper, you don’t have to reference an article, just write in a way that makes it clear why local readers would care about this issue.

- *Example of approach for smaller publication:* “We know how important it is to make sure children get the attention and stimulation they need in their first 1,000 days of life: reading, singing, and playing with colorful objects. But did you know the difference these same Early Childhood Development activities can make in the lives of the world’s most vulnerable children?”

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 document. 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: Ask your Senators to cosponsor and support the Global Child Thrive Act (S. 2715), introduced by Sens. Blunt (R-MO) and Coons (D-DE). Urge readers to contact their U.S. Senators to do the same. If your Senators are already co-sponsors, thank them and urge them to speak to Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman, Jim Risch (R-ID), to urge its consideration. [Check here](#) for Senate co-sponsors or on congress.gov by searching for the name of the bill.

6. Celebrate: Share it on social media. Send it to your members of Congress!