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Center for the
Study of
Social Policy
Ideas into Action

Automatic Benefit for Children (ABC) Coalition

Mission, Vision, and Goals

About: The ABC Coalition is co-chaired by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) and the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)*

Mission: Our mission is to create a child allowance, or a guaranteed minimum income for children, that provides regular, meaningful assistance to families, promotes racial equity and justice, enjoys broad public support, and serves as a foundation for a more equitable and inclusive social support system.

Vision: We believe all children should have what they need to pursue their goals and achieve their full potential. That requires a society in which all families can afford the essentials their children need to grow and thrive.

Our goal is to be a coalition that is intersectional, intentional, and impactful.

We believe a child allowance, or a guaranteed income for children, can advance racial and economic justice and provide families with children the regular support they need. It is essential that we work intersectionally to realize this vision. We think a coalition can help achieve this intersectional approach by:

- **Developing and publishing a set of principles** for a child allowance that is generous and ensures dignity for all families with children; is inclusive of children and families of all races, ethnicities, and immigration statuses, including children with ITINs; is straightforward and easy for families to access; supplements, but does not supplant, other crucial supports such as food and cash assistance, investments in child care, and paid family leave; and offers a regular per-child payment without administrative barriers to receipt or eligibility such as work requirements, behavioral restrictions, or family caps on the number of eligible children.
- **Creating a formal platform for sharing ideas**, research, projects, and educational opportunities across the coalition.
- **Disseminating communications**, polling, and messaging around a child allowance; explaining how a child allowance complements but does not supplant existing policy and other desired investments such as paid leave and child care; and building public support for the policy.
- **Lifting up families' voices** by bringing families and youth into the policymaking process in order to ensure that family and youth perspectives shape our policy proposals./
- **Building support at the grassroots, local, state, and national levels** for a child allowance modeled on the coalition's principles.
- **Educating, strategizing, and communicating with lawmakers to build political will to enact a child allowance**, including members of Congress, state legislators, and local elected officials.

The coalition should be diverse and intersectional, including groups that will prioritize a child allowance while working on different policy issues to have the desired impact. It should include groups focused on early childhood, youth, education, health, civil rights, racial justice, immigrant rights, faith, labor, social security, disability, child welfare, anti-poverty, and youth justice at the national, state, local, and grassroots levels.



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Why do we need a child allowance?

Families are working harder than ever but are struggling with the rising costs of raising children. The USDA estimates [the cumulative cost of raising a child](#) from birth to age 17 is upwards of \$233,610, or between \$12,000 and \$13,000 a year, in 2015 dollars. Even many families with moderate incomes struggle with these costs, and families with low incomes often cannot afford basic necessities. For decades, politicians have put up barriers to prosperity for families and communities by decimating cash assistance for families with children and failing to provide the necessary investments in food assistance and other programs that meet basic needs. Today, the United States invests less in children than [comparable wealthy countries](#), and only about [9 percent of federal spending is on children](#)—roughly equivalent to government spending on interest payments on debt. The United States' [high child poverty rate](#) is a direct result of this underinvestment. According to the Center on Poverty & Social Policy at Columbia University, before the pandemic hit approximately 13.6 percent of children overall were living in poverty as defined by the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). According to other commonly-used measures of poverty, such as that used by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United States' child poverty rate is [even higher](#) than under the SPM. Because of how systemic racism shapes families' opportunities and policies that directly and indirectly exclude families of color from supports and services, children of color have significantly higher poverty rates than white children: 23.7 percent of Black non-Hispanic children, 21.7 percent of Hispanic children, 16.7 percent of Native American children, and 12.1 percent of Asian American & Pacific Islander children are living in poverty, compared to 7 percent of white children.

A child allowance can significantly [reduce child poverty](#) and advance racial equity. The Center on Poverty & Social Policy estimates that an annual child allowance of \$3,600 for children under age six and \$3,000 for children six to 17 would reduce child poverty by 45 percent overall and it would reduce Black child poverty by 52 percent, Hispanic child poverty by 45 percent, Native American child poverty by 62 percent, Asian American and Pacific Islander child poverty by 37 percent, and White child poverty by 39 percent. A child allowance would also improve child well-being over the long term. In their landmark 2019 report, the [National Academy of Sciences](#) (NAS), , detailed how important adequate income is to children's health and well-being, and synthesized decades of research concluding that increasing families' incomes can improve children's outcomes both because it allows families to afford goods and services that promote children's healthy development and because it reduces familial stressors, allowing for a more responsive environment and positive parent-child interactions. As a result, the additional income has [long-term benefits](#) for children's educational attainment, employment, and health.

A child allowance is a smart investment in the country's future. As the NAS report notes, the research is clear that that child poverty is associated with significant [costs to the economy](#)—in part because of decreased earnings and poorer health over the course of a person's life starting in childhood. Experts have estimated that the costs of child poverty come to between 4 and 5.4 percent of GDP, or approximately \$1 trillion annually. The NAS report concludes, therefore, that “it is likely that significant investment in reducing child poverty will be very [cost-effective over time](#).”

We believe that every child should have their basic needs met with a guaranteed minimum income to grow and thrive. In a nation as wealthy as the United States, we have the resources to do this.

Why do we need a coalition?



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Now is the time to build a movement to demand a generous, inclusive child allowance that provides meaningful income support to families with children. There is growing bipartisan support for a child allowance and there are promising proposals before Congress to reform the existing Child Tax Credit to function more like a child allowance. To ensure that a child allowance is not only enacted but that it advances racial justice, provides meaningful support to all families who need it, and endures, we need to work together.

About CSSP. *The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) works to achieve a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children, youth, and families thrive. We translate ideas into action, promote public policies grounded in equity, and support strong and inclusive communities. We advocate with and for all children, youth, and families marginalized by public policies and institutional practices. Learn more at www.CSSP.org.*

About CDF. *The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit child advocacy organization that has worked relentlessly for more than 40 years to ensure a level playing field for all children. We champion [policies](#) and [programs](#) that lift children out of poverty; protect them from abuse and neglect; and ensure their access to health care, quality education, and a moral and spiritual foundation. Supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations, CDF advocates nationwide on behalf of children to ensure children are always a priority. Learn more at www.childrensdefense.org.*