

Support Funding to End All Forms of Violence Against Children

March 13, 2023

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chairman
LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to urge you to fund important programs that support prevention of and response to violence against children in the FY2024 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. Half the world's children – nearly one billion– are victims of violence annually. Violence against children includes physical, emotional, and sexual violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Around the world, an estimated 160 million children are engaged in child labor, this accounts for nearly [1 in 10 children worldwide](#).

Recent world conflicts, natural disasters, and pandemic have only exacerbated these issues. Over [8.2 million children](#) have lost a parent or caregiver to the pandemic to date, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and hazardous labor. Due to the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan more children are being forced into early marriage or work to help feed their families. These vulnerable children need protection and access to essential services to keep them safe now and sustain them long-term. A growing body of research has shown that adverse childhood experiences impact the brain development of children, affecting their lifelong health, well-being, and future education and employment opportunities. Cultivating future prosperity in any society is dependent on investing in and ensuring the healthy development of the next generation.

To ensure the continued leadership and influence of the U.S. in the protection of children from violence globally we request the following for FY24:

\$10 million to support Violence against Children Surveys. Violence against Children Surveys (VACS) are nationally representative household surveys of children, adolescents, and youth. A first step in preventing violence against children is gaining a better understanding of its magnitude, nature, and consequences. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides technical and financial support to countries to conduct Violence against Children Surveys (VACS) to measure and better understand girls' and boys' experiences of physical, emotional, and sexual violence.

- **Justification:** Before receiving CDC support for a VACS, countries must agree to develop a national action plan to address violence based on the survey's findings, which are used to guide program and policy development to prevent violence before it starts. With this reliable evidence, countries can make better decisions using limited resources to develop, launch and evaluate violence prevention programs and child protection systems. Funding is used to implement surveys in additional countries. Each VACS costs an estimated \$3 million, with the CDC completing an average of three surveys each fiscal year. Additional funding is used to support technical assistance and capacity building, strengthen prevention and response efforts, and build the capacities to design, implement, and monitor evidence-based interventions. While VACS are mostly international facing, a VACS survey has been implemented in Baltimore to address domestic violence against children as well.

Language Request: *Violence Against Children Surveys, Reports VACS*

The Committee directs that, not later than 90 days after enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in consultation with the Secretary of State and the USAID Administrator, shall submit a report to the Committee on the implementation and delivery of the Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS) in active countries that have completed the survey implementation in the corresponding fiscal year and are engaged in the data to action process, including monitoring and evaluation. The report should capture the implementing countries' efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children; technical support provided by the U.S. government, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the State Department, especially the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and USAID; and research, global thought leadership, and innovative efforts to respond to the findings of VACS reports.

- **Justification:** The Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS) measure the prevalence and nature and consequences of violence against children, adolescents, and young people. The disaggregated data collected and analyzed from the surveys is detailed enough to help identify the potential risks and protective factors in individual communities which can guide specific policy and programmatic actions to prevent and respond to violence against children as well as assess the impact and effectiveness of services. The surveys also help identify existing gaps in the continuum of prevention and response to violence against children. The information gleaned from the surveys informs each country's evidence-based policy and programmatic response, including through cooperation with bilateral and multilateral development partners. A report capturing the experiences of VACS-implementing countries and U.S. technical support for VACS implementation how each will better inform Congress on the impact of the VACS and help identify gaps and areas of improvement. VACS are then repeated to gauge the effectiveness of interventions and further target improvements.

At least \$118 million for the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB). ILAB engagement and technical cooperation initiatives have made a critical difference in the lives of close to [2 million children and 185,000 families](#) through education and livelihood support and increased capacity of governments and other stakeholders to combat child labor and forced labor. ILAB is the only U.S. agency that works to end exploitative child labor. These projects most commonly provide education and life skills to children and youth and give their parents support to allow children to stay in school rather than work. ILAB also reports on consumer products made through forced or child labor and helps to build the capacity of the private sector to address the issue, including companies working in tobacco, rubber, tea, cocoa, sugarcane, cotton, and many other areas.

- **Justification:** ILAB accounts for the largest allocation of all U.S. Government spending on efforts to prevent and address violence against children. The requested funding would allow ILAB to continue its work to prevent and respond to exploitative child labor by holding current funding levels, robustly funding technical assistance for worker rights to countries with which the U.S. has trade agreement or preference programs to ensure consistency with expanding U.S. trade commitments, and continue the strong evaluation of programs.

We value the impact made by global efforts to end all forms of violence against children and urge your subcommittee to fully fund these critical programs in the Fiscal Year 2024 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. We are also writing Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee of the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee in support of the Vulnerable Children account, the Department of State Child Protection Compacts, and efforts to end child marriage.

Finally, we urge the U.S. Government to develop and implement a comprehensive and coordinated strategy built upon evidence-based practices and adopt common metrics and indicators to monitor progress to prevent, address, and end violence against children and youth across the various agencies and accounts contributing funds to this work. We greatly appreciate your consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,