

October 2, 2023

Director Shalanda Young
Office of Management and Budget
Executive Office of the President
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Young,

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 FY2025 President's Budget Request.

Half of 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. More than 8.2 million children worldwide have lost a caregiver due to the pandemic. These children are at increased risk of child marriage, child labor, and other forms of online and offline violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect. This is especially true for children living with disabilities, who are more likely to experience severe physical punishment and are at higher risk of sexual violence.

Children who live in conflict and crisis settings are at serious risk of violence. According to the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, the highest ever violations against children during armed conflict took place in 2022. The year was marked by at least 1,160 attacks on schools, students and educational personnel as well as an increase in military use of school. These conflicts have either closed off or seriously obstructed access to education for millions of children.

Vulnerable children need protection and access to essential services that keep them safe now and sustain them long-term. A growing body of research has shown that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) impact the healthy brain development of children, affecting their lifelong health, well-being, and future education and employment opportunities. Repeated exposure to violence in childhood can impede a child's ability to succeed in school and increase the likelihood that they become a victim or perpetrator of violence.

The U.S. has established itself as a global leader in protecting children from exploitation and violence. Working alongside other nations and civil society organizations, U.S. foreign assistance plays a vital role in tackling issues like child trafficking, exploitative and forced child labor, and sexual exploitation of children. The U.S. has also been a leader in protecting children and youth in situations of armed conflict, preventing child, early, and forced marriage, and ending harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and cutting.

Over the last decade, U.S. government support has been critical to the reduction in global child labor and child marriage. However, UNICEF estimates that as a result of the pandemic, ten million additional child marriages may occur before the end of 2030. Similarly, global progress to end child labor has stalled, with the number of children who participate in forced labor rising to 160 million - nearly 1 in 10 children worldwide. In order to ensure the continued leadership and influence of the U.S. in the protection of children from violence globally we request the following:

CATEGORY	TOPLINE REQUEST AMOUNT
VULNERABLE CHILDREN ACCOUNT	No less than \$35 million for the Vulnerable Children account , which supports USAID’s Children in Adversity office to coordinate assistance to orphans and other vulnerable children.
DEPARTMENT OF STATE CHILD PROTECTION COMPACT PARTNERSHIPS	At least \$15 million for the Department of State Child Protection Compact (CPC) Partnership , which are \$5 million multi-year commitments between the State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (JTIP) and partner governments to bolster efforts to combat child labor, sex trafficking and online sexual exploitation and abuse of children.
EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS & ADDRESSING CHILD MARRIAGE	No less than \$30,000,000 to be dedicated to the implementation of a coordinated and comprehensive effort to end child marriage and meet the needs of married girls globally in alignment with the <i>U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls</i> .
VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN & YOUTH SURVEYS	At least \$10 million to support Violence Against Children & Youth Surveys. <i>Violence Against Children & Youth Surveys (VACS)</i> 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.
BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL LABOR AFFAIRS (ILAB)	No less than \$118,000,000 for the Bureau of International Labor Affairs [ILAB] to help improve working conditions and labor standards for workers around the world by carrying out its statutory mandates and international responsibilities, including in promoting the elimination of the worst forms of child labor and forced labor.

We also 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 all forms of 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,

American Academy of Pediatrics

ChildFund International

Child Rescue Coalition Inc.

Equimundo

Futures Without Violence

Global Campaign for Education-US

Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation

International Justice Mission

Marsh Law Firm PLLC

National Child Protection Task Force

Together for Girls

Union for Reform Judaism

United States International Council on Disabilities

Women of Reform Judaism

World Relief

World Vision US

UNICEF USA

ANNEX: FUNDING REQUEST AND JUSTIFICATION NARRATIVE:

- **\$35 million for the Vulnerable Children account**, which supports USAID's Children in Adversity office to coordinate assistance to orphans and other vulnerable children. Resources for the account help to implement the United States Government Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity (APCCA) whole-of-government strategy to build strong beginnings through early childhood development, support for children living outside family-based care, and protection for children from violence, abuse, and neglect.

***Justification:** A modest expansion of funding to \$35 million in FY25 would allow the Children in Adversity Office to bolster the integration of early childhood interventions into new and existing foreign assistance programs serving vulnerable children and their families, per the direction of the Global Child Thrive Act. This level of investment would also further programming focused on child safeguarding initiatives, both online and offline, among U.S. government personnel and partners and strengthening social service workforce capacity.*

- **\$15 million for the Department of State Child Protection Compact (CPC) Partnership**, which are \$5 million multi-year commitments between the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (JTIP) and partner governments to bolster efforts to combat child labor, sex trafficking and online sexual exploitation and abuse of children. The CPC Partnership supports the sustainable development of partner governments' capacity to hold perpetrators of child sex and labor trafficking accountable under the law, provide comprehensive services for child trafficking survivors, and expand child trafficking prevention and awareness. April 6, 2023 report, titled Human Trafficking: Department of State Collaborates with Partner Governments on Child Protection Compacts but Should Strengthen Oversight (GAO-23-105390), GAO recommended that the Department should strengthen oversight of the compacts, specifically over the contributions of partner country governments to current and future compacts.

***Justification:** The Philippines, a global hotspot for online sexual exploitation and abuse of children, has participated in two CPC Partnerships, which have supported its capacity to improve prevention efforts, provide effective and appropriate child protective services to victims and identify and bring perpetrators to justice. An FY25 allocation of at least \$15 million for CPC Partnerships will allow for three additional compacts to support governments around the world that currently lack the infrastructure and capacity to respond to similar forms of child trafficking. Also, in April 6, 2023 report, titled Human Trafficking: Department of State Collaborates with Partner Governments on Child Protection Compacts but Should Strengthen Oversight (GAO-23-105390), GAO recommended that the Department should strengthen oversight of the compacts, specifically over the contributions of partner country governments to current and future compacts.*

- **\$30 million for the implementation of a coordinated and comprehensive effort to end child early and forced marriage.**

***Justification:** These increased funds include a new allotment of \$7,000,000 to the U.S. commitment to the joint UN Global Program to End Child Marriage, which has generated remarkable results addressing child marriage in 12 of the highest prevalence or high-burden countries. Some notable results from the program in 2022 show:*

- *In Nepal, 57,000 girls participated in life skills education, with 64 percent of the girls aged 15-19 years old reporting to have increased self-efficacy and that they can negotiate the delay of marriage and speak up without fear*
- *In Sierra Leone, over 60,000 community members participated in dialogues to promote gender equality, including specific sessions engaging men and boys on harmful masculinities, and sessions with traditional and religious leaders for consensus-building around ending child marriage.*
- *In Ethiopia, over 1,300 local women development groups have been supported to drive change and challenge harmful gender norms in their communities.*
- *In Zambia, 1,244 community welfare assistant committees were established with the support of the program, training committee members on case management that reached over 13,000 adolescents with child protection, health, education and other social services through referrals and follow-ups.*

• **\$10 million to support Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys.** Violence against Children and Youth 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 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 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. VACS data also informs U.S. foreign assistance programs to support countries' efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children. 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, conduct additional research using VACS data, strengthen prevention and response efforts, and build the capacities to design, implement, and monitor evidence-based interventions. While VACS have historically been conducted internationally, the city of Baltimore, Maryland will pilot the first-ever VACS in the U.S. in 2023, bringing critical learning from foreign assistance implementation home to improve child well-being in the U.S.*

• **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. ILAB plays a critical role in working to eradicate child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking, including through its research and reporting in its Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor, List of Products Produced by Forced or Indentured Child Labor. The appropriation will support continued publication of these important reports, including the tracking of goods through supply chains and identifying inputs made with child and forced labor.