

100 Days for Opportunity & Well-Being:

AN EXECUTIVE & ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION AGENDA FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

- The Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality’s Economic Security and Opportunity Initiative (GCPI ESOI) undertook a project to identify, develop, and prioritize human services-focused federal executive actions to improve economic security and well-being for children and families in the U.S. The resulting playbook presents a human services agenda that cuts across programs and this brief summarizes the main recommendations.
- This work was driven by a focus on racial equity and addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and recession (and its aftermath), harmful actions taken in recent years by the prior administration, and pre-existing challenges in human services programs. The project focused on presidential actions (including one Executive Order) and actions to be taken by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In developing the playbook, we collected and vetted ideas through an extensive process engaging over 130 policy experts (including some with lived experience with these programs) located across the country.

INTRODUCTION

Even before the pandemic began, tens of millions of Americans lived with deep economic insecurity. Black families, for example, already experienced higher poverty rates and unemployment rates¹ and typically had far less in savings² to weather the impact of a recession. People with low incomes, women, people of color, immigrants, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities suffer disproportionately³ due to generations of policies that have either failed to serve them or actively oppressed them.

The COVID-19 pandemic and policymakers’ response to it has had a profound impact on the health,⁴ economic security,⁵ and overall well-being⁶ of children and families in the United States. The pandemic and recession have greatly magnified existing inequities. Low-income families⁷ and families of color, particularly Black, American Indian, and Latinx families,⁸ have so far experienced the worst of it. The pandemic has forced a reckoning with what working families and families of color have known all along—our economic security system falls far short of what the people of our country deserve. Families and communities throughout the United States urgently need bold, equitable, and anti-racist human services to meet the challenges of our current moment. While legislative change is necessary, the executive branch can take various unilateral actions to better support families and advance racial and gender equity. And human services play a critical role in supporting families, particularly during recessions.⁹

The playbook presents a set of eight policy memos with recommendations for action in the first 100 days of the Biden-Harris Administration, along with a longer list of additional ideas. The memos are summarized below. (The order of the memos does not imply priority.)

POLICY MEMO SUMMARIES

1. IMPROVE FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY DURING THE PANDEMIC THROUGH AN EXECUTIVE ORDER

We recommend the administration issue an Executive Order to help address the impacts of the pandemic and accompanying recession on family economic security. We propose establishing an interagency task force to identify and consider cross-cutting recommendations to facilitate access to economic security supports during the pandemic and beyond. This includes improving access to Unemployment Insurance to help empower families to make the decisions that are right for them, without risking their health to take on unsafe work.

2. CONSIDER A RULEMAKING & GUIDANCE TO IMPROVE TANF

We recommend that ACF consider updating and revising TANF regulations and guidance documents to better support people experiencing poverty. Today TANF reaches only a small percentage due in part to work requirements, inequitable sanctions, and limited funding and accountability. We propose, among other things, that ACF consider regulating or issuing guidance to reduce the extent to which states misdirect TANF funds to purposes other than helping low-income families, and consider additional use of penalty relief policies to discourage states from reducing access to TANF benefits.

3. SUPPORT PREVENTION IN CHILD WELFARE THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FAMILY FIRST LAW

We recommend that ACF promote the prevention of removing children from their homes by improving and expediting the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act. We suggest activities intended to increase the number of high-quality interventions that qualify for federal funding, enhance the cultural relevance of prevention interventions to better meet the needs of children and families, and improve online and social media tools to better publicize ACF's ability to fund qualifying programs.

4. ADVANCE EVIDENCE-BASED & INCLUSIVE TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION PROGRAMS

We recommend that ACF take several steps to promote evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs, including restoration of the original evidence-based implementation of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Program and supporting more demonstrations that focus on youth of color and foster racial equity.

5. REVIEW & UPDATE HHS POLICIES TO INCLUDE & PROTECT LGBTQ+ YOUTH & FAMILIES

We recommend that HHS review policies and programs across the agency to (1) identify and reverse harmful policies and (2) take proactive measures to include protections for LGBTQ+ youth and families that are equitable, inclusive, and better meet the needs of LGBTQ+ people. This includes ensuring that HHS policy interprets all of the nondiscrimination requirements within its jurisdiction to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

6. ELEVATE THE FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION & SERVICES PROGRAM TO AN INDEPENDENT OFFICE

We recommend elevating the Family Violence Prevention and Service Program (FVPSP) to its own office within ACF. This would draw greater attention to the problem of Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence (IPV/DV) and could help focus more resources and capacity to address it. A new office could also work to ensure that other social service programs and systems like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child welfare are addressing IPV/DV appropriately and effectively.

7. STABILIZE & STRENGTHEN CHILD CARE IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

We recommend ACF take steps to stabilize and strengthen child care as it faces an existential threat amidst the pandemic and recession. The child care field requires a substantial investment of federal funds. The memo operates under the assumption that Congress and the president will make substantial new funding available in the coming months. Among other things, we recommend supporting home-based child care providers, collaborating with the Small Business Administration to support child care providers as small businesses, and collaborating with the departments of Education and Labor to address early learning workforce issues.

8. REVIVE MOMENTUM TOWARDS A FAMILY-CENTERED CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAM

We recommend that ACF take a series of actions to reorient the child-support system towards a family-centered approach. Such an approach focuses on meeting families' needs and ensuring more regular and reasonable child support payments instead of using child support payments to fund government programs. Proposed actions emphasize the need to use evidence to set and modify child support orders, encourage states to distribute 100 percent of child support payments to families, and forgive child support debts owed to governments.

RELEVANT BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION ACTIONS TO DATE

On January 22nd, President Biden issued an "Executive Order on Economic Relief Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic,"¹⁰ which includes a directive for departments

and agencies to identify executive actions they can take which are similar to some recommended in this playbook, such as improving access to federal programs.

On January 20th, President Biden issued “An Executive Order on Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation,”¹¹ which directs all departments and agencies, including HHS, to conduct a review of their policies to combat discrimination.

On January 21st, President Biden issued “An Executive Order on Supporting the Reopening and Continuing Operation of Schools and Early Childhood Education Providers,”¹² which, while largely about schools, does direct the provision of guidance to child care providers on safe operation during the pandemic, as included in this playbook.

ENDNOTES

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10. "Executive Order on Economic Relief Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic." The White House, 22 January 2021. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/22/executive-order-economic-relief-related-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.
11. "Executive Order on Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation." The White House, 20 January 2021. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-preventing-and-combating-discrimination-on-basis-of-gender-identity-or-sexual-orientation/>.
12. "Executive Order on Supporting the Reopening and Continuing Operation of Schools and Early Childhood Education Providers." The White House, 21 January 2021.

Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/21/executive-order-supporting-the-reopening-and-continuing-operation-of-schools-and-early-childhood-education-providers/>.