

December x, 2012

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Boehner, Senator Reid, Senator McConnell, and Representative Pelosi:

We write in regards to the ongoing bipartisan negotiations that seek a new budgetary framework to avoid the January “fiscal cliff.” It is our strong hope that the needs of our nation’s children be front and center as these negotiations continue and, hopefully, conclude in the coming days.

We share your goal to avoid any inaction that would potentially spur another recession as projected by the Congressional Budget Office. At the same time, we believe that any new budget framework must put children first – as part of the underlying framework, not merely as an afterthought once the framework has already been decided upon. Children are our future. It is time to both protect and invest in those who are the most vulnerable in our country – not leave them to chance.

According to data from 2011:

- One in five children – 16 million – in the U.S. (the wealthiest country on the planet) live in poverty, including one in four children under 5. Half of children under 6 in the U.S. live in low-income families.
- More than 8.5 million children in the U.S. lived in food insecure households.
- Children are not getting the early learning they need to succeed in school. Only 29 percent of eligible 3-5 year old children in the U.S. are enrolled in Head Start. Just 4.5 percent of eligible children are enrolled in Early Head Start. Only one in six eligible children receive a child care subsidy, but the quality of care many of those children are in (as well as the care children not receiving a subsidy are in) is relatively poor.
- Half of U.S. 4th grade students eligible for free or reduced price lunch fail to read at grade level.

- 40 percent of U.S. families with a substantiated child abuse report received no services in 2010.
- More than 1,500 children in the U.S. died due to abuse and neglect (47.7 percent were children under the age of one).
- Fifteen years after the creation of the State Children's Health Insurance Program, 10 percent of children in the U.S. still do not have health insurance.

The final budgetary framework will be a reflection of our nation's priorities – we believe that one of our nation's greatest priorities is, and must remain, our children. As you work to broker a compromise that would prevent the “fiscal cliff,” we urge you to avoid cuts to the safety net programs and vital services that benefit our children. Low-income families have already shouldered a disproportionate share of the nation's economic pain in recent years and it is imperative that we prevent any additional cuts to the programs that seek to assist these populations, including Head Start, Medicaid, child care, child abuse prevention programs, and a wide range of health, education, and child safety programs.

Difficult decisions need to be made. However, we cannot fulfill our shared goal of giving every child a fighting chance at a bright future if we agree to a bad budget deal that fails to protect them.

We thank you for your consideration and commitment to America's children.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator