

Voice Your Values: Congressional Meetings

BRIEFING DOCUMENT ON GLOBAL CHILD THRIVE ACT

This document is meant to assist you in your preparation for congressional meetings by providing background information on the issues you will be discussing with the offices of your members of Congress as part of the I AM Global Migration and Global Hunger campaigns.

BACKGROUND

More than 800 million people are suffering from chronic food insecurity, that's 1 in 9 people worldwide. We face humanitarian and development challenges in every corner of the globe. There are more than 70 million people forcibly displaced around the world, 25 million of whom are refugees. The international community is facing challenges unseen since World War II. From Syria to Central America, South Sudan to Burma—poverty, conflict, natural disaster, lack of opportunity, and climate shocks plague nations and communities alike, leading to an unprecedented amount of forced migration, which causes and exacerbates global health challenges and food insecurity.

Serving more than 127 million people in 114 countries in 2018, CRS can attest firsthand to the significant challenges faced by poor and vulnerable communities affected by forced migration or hunger and malnutrition, and to the positive impact of U.S.-sponsored foreign assistance. CRS is proud to partner with the U.S. government to bring hope to communities. In the face of these unprecedented challenges and global issues, CRS partners with the U.S. government to help farmers grow better crops despite climate change or drought, promote peace in communities divided by differences and provide immediate humanitarian response in emergencies. CRS also works with migrant and refugee children, and their families, to mitigate the negative consequences of life on the move by providing safe spaces for children to play and learn as well as good nutrition, clean water and sanitation, health services and parental support.

We believe that our work together in the U.S, as a movement of advocates for justice and the common good, is a critical part of the solution to ending some of the worst aspects of global poverty. **Collectively, we can lead the way to solutions that ensure our brothers and sisters on the move can exercise their right to lead dignified lives, and ultimately thrive; that children, families and communities can be free from hunger, but not only that, that they have access to the nutritious food and interventions that they need to grow, develop and thrive. Your congressional visits with your members of Congress back home or in DC this Spring will be an opportunity to take part in addressing the worst aspects of global hunger and forced displacement, particularly for vulnerable children, by supporting the passage into law of the Global Child Thrive Act.**

The talking points on pages 4 and 5 can serve as a guide for how to structure your meeting with the offices of your members of Congress. The most important part of your preparation is to reflect on how you will express why you care about these issues. Think about the stories you can share with the offices about how you have been mobilizing as a campus community on these issues. The offices will not expect you to have all the answers to their questions about the bill. They will be most interested in why you are advocating on behalf of the very poor as their constituent.

BACKGROUND ON THE NEED FOR THIS LEGISLATION AND CURRENT STATE OF PLAY OF THE BILLS

Early Childhood Development

According to a report published in *The Lancet*, “a staggering 43 percent of children under five years of age—an estimated 250 million—living in low- and middle-income countries are at risk of suboptimal development caused by poverty, nutritional deficiencies, and inadequate learning opportunities.”

Early childhood is the period of life that begins prenatally and extends to eight years of age. **Poor health and nutrition, inadequate learning opportunities and exposure to conflict and displacement impair children’s ability to reach optimal developmental milestones and can have profound and long-lasting impact on their brains and bodies.** The good news is that high-quality interventions can mitigate the impact of these factors. Early Childhood Development (ECD) endeavors to support children’s holistic well-being in these early years when critical brain architecture is built. Integrated Early Childhood Development programming includes age-appropriate mental stimulation and nurturing care such as singing and reading, playing with colorful objects and shapes, and interactive caregiving.

A 20-year study of children in Jamaica by Nobel prize-winning economist, James Heckman, showed that Early Childhood Development interventions for children zero to three years of age increased their future earnings by 25 percent. Conversely, the failure to invest in ECD has significant repercussions on a country’s economic growth, peace, and prosperity. Adults who experienced suboptimal care during their early childhood years earn significantly less than the average adult in their country and are more likely to drop out of school. This lost income and potential traps families in poverty and lowers their country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), leaving families and countries with less to spend on health and education.

What is the connection between the realities of forced displacement and child development? The human brain grows most rapidly during the first three years of life, and we know more today about the effect of toxic stress on a growing young brain. Being uprooted from home as a young child can have significant negative repercussions. For example, the chaos and fear associated with life on the move can directly disrupt a child’s brain development given that when a child feels unsafe, his or her brain will spend more time focusing on survival, rather than on new areas of growth and exploration. Children experiencing toxic stress will grow smaller brains with fewer neural connections than children who are not traumatized; they may experience speech or reading delays, and later suffer from depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues. In addition, migrants often have a lack of adequate nutrient intake and limited access to health care. This can be particularly devastating if children experience these deprivations during key developmental windows. Studies have found that forced migration during early childhood is associated with poor cognitive well-being later in life.

What is the connection between food insecurity, malnutrition and young children? It is not enough for children to simply have access to food, they need *the right kind of nutritious food with sufficient vitamins, minerals and protein* to properly grow and develop. Hundreds of millions of children worldwide lack access to proper nutritional intake. Malnutrition stunts children’s growth and impairs their cognitive and physical development. It is the underlying cause of 45 percent of all preventable deaths worldwide of children under five. Incorporating Early Childhood Development activities (such as helping caregivers to use meal time as a place to bond with children) into U.S. government-funded food security and nutrition programs would multiply positive outcomes for children. Nutrition programs are more effective and impactful if they are combined with Early Childhood Development (ECD).

Moving from Surviving to Thriving:

The United States has been a world leader in saving children's and mothers' lives for the past 30 years. Since 1990, an estimated 100 million children have been saved, due in large part to the United States' investment in child survival programs. In addition, maternal mortality rates have dropped 44 percent with the help of U.S. funding. With simple, cost-effective interventions like monitoring children's growth, immunizations, treatment for diarrhea, pneumonia and malaria, and clean water and sanitation, millions of children and mothers are alive today who otherwise would not be.

While the global community has made great strides in ending the preventable deaths of mothers and children, there is more that can be done to multiply the impact of this funding. Millions of children who live through bouts of pneumonia or diarrheal disease because of child survival interventions still bear the burden of poor developmental outcomes. Thanks to new research, we know better now how to support human brain growth.

Experts now recommend focusing on caregivers and vulnerable children with Early Childhood Development activities during the first years of life to ensure children living in adversity do not fall below their potential. **Unfortunately, the U.S. government does not yet prioritize the integration of ECD into international programs that serve children.**

The solution: The Global Child Thrive Act, S. 2715 (Senate version) and H.R. 4864 (House version), if passed into law, would mandate that Early Childhood Development be integrated into U.S. foreign aid programs, including our humanitarian programs, that support young children and their families. The bill does not call for additional funding, just a small modification of current foreign aid programs that serve young children and their families to ensure the greatest impact.

What is the State of Play with the legislation? On October 28th, Representatives Joaquin Castro (D-TX) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) in the House and Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Chris Coons (D-DE) in the Senate simultaneously introduced the Global Child Thrive Act.

- The House version of the bill, H.R. 4864, was marked up and successfully reported out of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on December 18, 2019! It has now been referred to the full House and will need additional support to be considered and passed by the end of the year.
- The Senate version of the bill, S. 2715, was referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee but has not been taken up yet by the committee and therefore needs additional support.

Both bills require the constituent voice—your voices—to create support for them to pass in their respective chambers. Collecting bipartisan cosponsors for the bills is one way to signal support for consideration for a vote.

You can **google the name of the bill and congress.gov** for a current list of cosponsors of the bill in addition to tracking the bill's movement in each chamber of Congress. Follow the links here for the [House tracker](#) and [Senate tracker](#) for the bills.

TALKING POINTS FOR CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS

FRAMING

- **Thank You:**
 - Thank you for giving your time to discuss international development and humanitarian issues.
 - *Please **check their website** and thank your member for something they have done in the past. If you cannot find something that relates to the topic or another issue you care about, thank them for their service in Congress.*
- **Introduction: Who You Are and Why You're There**
 - We're here today to talk about the unprecedented level of forced migration and hunger around the world, and the need to promote just policies that allow people on the move and those suffering from hunger and malnutrition, especially children, to exercise their right to lead safe and dignified lives, and ultimately thrive.
 - *This is an opportunity to share about yourself, your work on campus, and your connection to CRS as you set the stage for the issues.*
- **Moving to the issue: Set the Stage for the Conversation**
 - The U.S. government has long supported children and families living in poverty around the world. We are grateful for bipartisan Congressional leadership in this area and are here today to ask for your support for legislation which will improve the impact of our nation's poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance without requiring additional funding and multiply positive outcomes for children. Thanks to new research, we can maximize our foreign aid investments by ensuring children not only survive preventable diseases but thrive. We can do this by incorporating Early Childhood Development activities into U.S. international programs focused on children and their families.
 - *Share about the importance of poverty-focused international programs around the world, and why it is critically important that the United States build on these successes by ensuring vulnerable children are able to grow up to thrive and reach their God-given potential.*
 - **Most importantly**, share stories about how you and others on your campus have worked to mobilize around the issues of global hunger and forced migration and why you care about this bill.

THE ASK: SENATE

If your Senator is not an existing cosponsor of the bill ([Check here](#)):

- **We urge the Senator to cosponsor S. 2715, the Global Child Thrive Act.** This legislation would direct the administration to integrate Early Childhood Development activities into foreign aid programs supporting young children and their families. The passage into law of this legislation would allow for a more effective use of foreign aid funding and multiply positive outcomes for children who are currently at risk of falling short of their developmental potential. **[Sens. Blunt (R-MO) and Coons (D-DE) are leading in the Senate.]**

If your Senator is already a cosponsor of the bill ([Check here](#)):

- Thank you for cosponsoring S. 2715, the Global Child Thrive Act. As you know, the passage into law of this legislation would allow for a more effective use of foreign aid funding and multiply positive outcomes for children who are currently at risk of falling short of their developmental potential.
- The Global Child Thrive Act has been referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and needs additional support to move forward. **Please consider speaking or writing to Chairman James Risch (R-ID) and Ranking member Bob Menendez (D-NJ) in support of its consideration before the committee. [CRS can provide a draft letter.]**

THE ASK: HOUSE

If your Representative is not an existing cosponsor ([Check here](#)):

- **We urge the Representative to cosponsor H.R. 4864, the Global Child Thrive Act.** This legislation would direct the administration to integrate Early Childhood Development activities into foreign aid programs supporting young children and their families. The passage into law of this legislation would allow for a more effective use of foreign aid funding and multiply positive outcomes for children who are currently at risk of falling short of their developmental potential. ***[Reps. Castro (D-TX) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA) are leading the effort in the House.]***

If your Representative is already a cosponsor ([Check here](#)):

- Thank you for cosponsoring H.R. 4864, the Global Child Thrive Act. As you know, the passage into law of this legislation would allow for a more effective use of foreign aid funding and multiply positive outcomes for children who are currently at risk of falling short of their developmental potential.
- The Global Child Thrive Act was marked up and successfully reported out of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs at the end of 2019 and needs additional support to move forward to full House consideration. **Please consider speaking with or writing to House Leadership to obtain floor time to pass this bill. [CRS can provide a draft letter.]**

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS TO RAISE

- If the Senator/Representative travels abroad, please let us know if they would like to visit CRS programming. CRS operates in 114 countries around the world and integrates ECD into programs in 20 countries serving 1.36 million children and their families. CRS would welcome an opportunity to show the Senator/Representative the impact U.S. dollars have on the ground.
- Ask the office to please think of you and CRS as resources both in the state/district and in Washington, DC.
- Express an interest in continuing to dialogue with the Senator/Representative, or his/her staff, on these and other issues of mutual interest.