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<td>AL</td>
<td>I run a food pantry, but it's not enough. We need funding for SNAP</td>
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<td>4/26/24</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>Re: the April 9. article “National opinion: Senate must approve expanded child tax credit to fight hunger”</td>
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<td>Do your part</td>
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Go to Colorado media

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<td>Democracy in action</td>
<td>Boulder Weekly</td>
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Go to Florida media

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<td>The Child Tax Credit Changed My Life; Bring It Back</td>
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<td>The child tax credit changed my life; lawmakers have a chance to bring it back</td>
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<td>I Run a Food Pantry. Without Food Stamps, It's Not Enough.</td>
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<td>Hawaii Tribune-Herald</td>
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<td>Crapo’s playing politics with popular child tax credit</td>
<td>Idaho State Journal</td>
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<td>4/29/24</td>
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<td>Commentary: Lawmakers should spend a night in a homeless shelter</td>
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<td>Stop playing politics with Child Tax Credit</td>
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<td>'Transformational advocacy' goes a long way</td>
<td>Chicago Sun-Times</td>
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<td>Hoosier Mom: Bring Back Expanded Child Tax Credit</td>
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<td>Portland Press-Herald</td>
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<td>We must prevent a decrease of WIC funding due to congressional inaction</td>
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<td>The Queen Zone</td>
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<td>Protecting SNAP, bolstering child tax credit would greatly alleviate food insecurity</td>
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<td>We're waiting for the Senate to act on enhanced federal Child Tax Credit</td>
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<td>The importance of home</td>
<td>Columbia Missourian</td>
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<td>Support childhood tax credits for low-income families</td>
<td>Joplin Globe</td>
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<td>Expand Child Tax Credit For Low-Income Families</td>
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<td>Daily American Republic</td>
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<td>Push senators to approve stalled Child Tax Credit in Congress</td>
<td>St. Louis Post-Dispatch</td>
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<td>Stagnating U.S. Senate bill could further aid Missouri educational outcomes</td>
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<td>Press Congress to protect SNAP, expand benefits for hunger</td>
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<td>West Magazine</td>
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<td>Low-income families need more food aid</td>
<td>Phelps County Focus</td>
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<td>Having a child shouldn't cause financial catastrophe</td>
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<td>Housing crisis is national in scope</td>
<td>Las Vegas Sun</td>
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<td>New Hampshire Union Leader</td>
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<td>We urgently need national action on the Child Tax Credit</td>
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<td>How long must families wait for child tax credit?</td>
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<td>High Food prices</td>
<td>Charlotte Observer</td>
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<td>Budd, Tillis should move on Child Tax Credit</td>
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<td>1/8/24</td>
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<td>Rep. Armstrong voted for extension of CTC, hoping Sens. Hoeven and Cramer will do the same</td>
<td>Grand Forks Herald</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
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<td>Senate must pass the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act</td>
<td>Grand Forks Herald</td>
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<td>It's time to protect the next generation from stress</td>
<td>Grand Forks Herald</td>
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<td>Expanding the child tax credit to help needy families is the just and fair thing to do</td>
<td>Cleveland Plain Dealer</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
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<td>OH</td>
<td>We need a unified Ohio delegation to get the Farm Bill across the finish line</td>
<td>Cleveland Plain Dealer</td>
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<td>Expand tax credits that directly help working-class families</td>
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<td>Wage war against hunger, poverty</td>
<td>The Oklahoman</td>
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<td>Lawmakers resistant to restoring low-income tax credits should spend a night in a homeless shelter</td>
<td>Oklahoma Voice</td>
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**Go to Oregon media**

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<td>Corvallis Gazette-Times</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
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<td>1/2/24</td>
<td>OR</td>
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<td>Albany Democrat-Herald</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
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<td>Bipartisan win</td>
<td>Columbia Gorge News</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
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<td>2/1/24</td>
<td>OR</td>
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<td>Eugene Weekly</td>
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<td>Albany Democrat-Herald</td>
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<td>Lift People Out of Poverty</td>
<td>Eugene Weekly</td>
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<td>OR</td>
<td>Thanks for clarification</td>
<td>Columbia Gorge News</td>
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<td>6/5/24</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Participate in democracy</td>
<td>Columbia Gorge News</td>
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<td>6/8/24</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Protect SNAP in the new Farm Bill</td>
<td>Tribune Chronicle</td>
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**Go to Pennsylvania media**

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<td>People who give hope when poverty rises</td>
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<td>Altoona Mirror</td>
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<td>PA</td>
<td>WIC changes childrens' lives, but not every life it could change</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette</td>
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<td>2/5/24</td>
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<td>Congress must ensure millions of children don't face hunger in America</td>
<td>Patriot News</td>
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<td>2/15/23</td>
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<td>Having a baby in America should be easier</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette</td>
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<td>4/25/24</td>
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<td>Lawmakers Should Spend a Night in a Homeless Shelter</td>
<td>Bucks County Beacon</td>
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<td>Child Tax Credit, SNAP</td>
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<td>PA</td>
<td>If only legislators spent a night in a shelter</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette</td>
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<td>Child Tax Credit, SNAP</td>
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<td>5/14/24</td>
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<td>I Run a Food Pantry But It's Not Enough. We Need Funding for SNAP</td>
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**Go to South Carolina media**

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<td>3/27/24</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Senators blocking tax cut for families for political gain</td>
<td>The Sumter Item</td>
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**Go to Tennessee media**

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<td>Urge Congress to expand child tax credit, support child nutrition in the Farm Bill</td>
<td>Oak Ridger</td>
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<td>A billionaire gambler gave Abbott $6 million. It's time for Texans to reclaim their democracy.</td>
<td>Houston Chronicle</td>
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<td>Listen to Results</td>
<td>Dallas Morning News</td>
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<td>Be a voter and an advocate</td>
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<td>3/17/24</td>
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<td>Back expanded child tax credit</td>
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<td>Dallas Morning News</td>
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<td>Long-term changes</td>
<td>Houston Chronicle</td>
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<td>Lawmakers should spend a night in a homeless shelter</td>
<td>Tyler Morning Telegram</td>
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<td>5/9/24</td>
<td>TX</td>
<td>I run a food pantry but it's not enough. We need funding for SNAP.</td>
<td>Tyler Morning Telegram</td>
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<td>6/8/24</td>
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<td>I Run a Food Pantry, but It's Not Enough. We Need Funding for SNAP.</td>
<td>The Gilmer Mirror</td>
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**Go to Utah media**

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<td>Child tax credit actually saves money. Romney and Lee should support the bill that expands it.</td>
<td>Salt Lake Tribune</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
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**Go to Washington state media**

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<td>Cutting child poverty would help fulfill the dream</td>
<td>Yakima Herald-Republic</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
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<td>2/4/24</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Kudos to Congress for looking out for kids</td>
<td>Kitsap Sun</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
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<td>3/6/24</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Yes, your vote — and your voice — matters</td>
<td>Yakima Herald-Republic</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
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<td>Congress should act on housing</td>
<td>The Columbian</td>
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<td>Efforts to confront homelessness encouraging</td>
<td>Everett Herald</td>
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<td>Renter Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit</td>
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<td>Don’t penalize those without shelter</td>
<td>Everett Herald</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
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<td>Childrens’ poverty can be reduced</td>
<td>Snohomish Tribune</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
<td>Child Tax Credit, global nutrition</td>
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<td>Speak up to boost child care</td>
<td>The Columbian</td>
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<td>WA</td>
<td>Rents Are Unaffordable Nationwide. A Renter’s Tax Credit Could Help.</td>
<td>FāVS News</td>
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<td>5/24/24</td>
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<td>Child care crisis: Nurture our country’s future</td>
<td>Seattle Times</td>
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<td>Changes ahead for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)?</td>
<td>Snohomish County Food Bank Newsletter</td>
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<td>Grads can find meaning in life by volunteering</td>
<td>Everett Herald</td>
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<td>Help feed impoverished children</td>
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<td>Safety nets for SNAP food benefits being improved</td>
<td>Snohomish Tribune</td>
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<td>CTC can help end child hunger</td>
<td>The Dominion Post</td>
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<td>Families need tax relief</td>
<td>The Exponent Telegram</td>
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<td>Capito, Manchin must support CTC bill</td>
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<td>Lawmakers should spend a night in a homeless shelter</td>
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<td>Senate cannot delay vote on child tax credit</td>
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<td>Senators should seize opportunity to boost small business and help W.Va. kids</td>
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<td>Feel-good policies</td>
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<td>In the World’s Wealthiest Country, Housing Should Be a Human Right</td>
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<td>In the World’s Wealthiest Country, Housing Should Be a Human Right and a Community Builder</td>
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<td>The Child Tax Credit Changed My Life, Lawmakers Have a Chance to Bring It Back</td>
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<td>The Child Tax Credit Changed My Life, Congress Has a Chance to Bring It Back</td>
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<td>The Child Tax Credit Changed My Life, Lawmakers Have A Chance To Bring It Back</td>
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<td><strong>Why WIC Matters</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The US Needs Paid Parental and Medical Leave</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Final Push to Save Expanded Child Tax Credit as Senate Hopes Dim</strong></td>
<td>The 74</td>
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<td><strong>Rents Are Unaffordable Nationwide, A Renter’s Tax Credit Would Help.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Homeless mother calls for renter’s tax credit to make housing affordable</strong></td>
<td>People’s World</td>
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<td>4/6/24</td>
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<td><strong>A Renter’s Tax Credit Would Help People Like Me Stay in Our Homes</strong></td>
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<td>We Need a Renters' Tax Credit to Make Housing More Affordable</td>
<td>Counter Punch</td>
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<td>The Reality and Complexity of Homelessness in America</td>
<td>Coalition on Human Needs blog</td>
<td>Blog post</td>
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<td>Lawmakers Should Spend a Night in a Homeless Shelter</td>
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Alabama media
Montgomery Advertiser

I run a food pantry, but it's not enough. We need funding for SNAP

*I'm proud to help my neighbors. But food donations are no substitute for government nutrition programs like SNAP, which is now under threat

By Carla Ventura

May 15, 2024

I run a food pantry. I'm proud of the work we do. But if lawmakers passed a livable minimum wage or invested more in programs like SNAP, people wouldn't need to rely on pantries like mine.

Pantries are a critical piece of the anti-hunger puzzle, but they're filler pieces. Government nutrition programs — with the infrastructure and funding to get the job done — should be the centerpiece.

I grew up on food stamps, called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. My mother worked hard, but her wages were too low to meet our basic needs. Sometimes we felt embarrassed pulling out the stamps at the register — I worried kids would talk about me at school.

But the aid was a blessing. It helped keep us from hunger. Even still, food stamps weren't designed to last the whole month. Most months, we had to travel long distances — often outside our county — to find food pantries so we could get by.

SNAP is the nation's most effective anti-hunger program, feeding nearly a quarter of all U.S. children. The program reduces hunger by about 30 percent, improves long-term educational, health, and economic outcomes for children, and helps address systemic racial disparities in poverty.

SNAP is the first line of defense in a down economy. In fact, food insecurity fell to a record low of 10.2 percent in 2021 — in the middle of the pandemic — due to the pandemic-era boost in SNAP benefits. But now that those benefits have expired, nearly 13 percent of us experience food insecurity.
For many Americans, wages are simply too low. To meet basic needs in South Carolina, where I live, two adults with two children must earn over $21 per hour. But our state minimum wage is just $7.25.

A person would have to work 106 hours a week at that wage to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment here. Actually, the minimum wage isn’t enough to cover the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the country.

Over 44 million Americans rely on SNAP to combat hunger. Yet some members of Congress are proposing cutting the program by a whopping $30 billion over the coming decade. South Carolina alone, which is among the top 10 states with the greatest food insecurity, would suffer $400 million in cuts.

That would be devastating for families like mine.

I’m a single mother with three kids. At age three, one of my sons was diagnosed with autism, and I couldn’t find affordable daycare that could accommodate his needs. Every week, I had to leave work at a moment’s notice to help him or rush him home. I couldn’t sustain employment. I needed help during that challenging time, and SNAP provided it.

I now run a food pantry, Food for All, where I’ve seen that I’m far from alone.

I listen to the stories of people who come here and share my own to ease their feelings of embarrassment. I breathe a sigh of relief with them when they tell me, “Now I can afford my medication,” “Now I can make rent,” or “Now I don’t have to choose between feeding my child and getting her new shoes.”

But other times, I have to watch those who’ve waited in long lines for an hour be turned away because the food has run out. I can’t possibly get enough food donations to meet the enormous need.

But I won’t give up. None of us can.

That’s why I continue to fight for robust funding — and against the proposed slashing — of SNAP. People shouldn’t have to rely on food pantries to feed themselves or their families.
We know what works. We saw how hunger decreased during the pandemic when it had been forecast to skyrocket because we invested in the well-being of families. We must do that again.

*Carla Ventura is a mother, founder of the nonprofit Food for All, and an Expert on Poverty with RESULTS from Columbia, South Carolina. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*


**Reprinted in:**

[https://www.timesdaily.com/opinion/commentaries/snap-is-centerpiece-for-anti-hunger-puzzle/article_c7034e72-22bb-a960-0fe94525cc4b.html](https://www.timesdaily.com/opinion/commentaries/snap-is-centerpiece-for-anti-hunger-puzzle/article_c7034e72-22bb-a960-0fe94525cc4b.html)
Alaska media
While our state Legislature works to make “Alaska friendly to Alaska families” by addressing Alaska’s child care crisis, our U.S. senators can provide critical support: They can follow the U.S. House’s lead to expand the Child Tax Credit (CTC).

The U.S. House has passed this bipartisan tax bill that expands the CTC for low-income families. Families making less than $60,000 could see their CTC increase an average of $900 per year. This will make it easier for millions of parents to make ends meet.

Child care and early education costs comprise as much as one-third of an Alaska family’s budget. The CTC is critical for offsetting this burden.

Every day the Senate delays is another day families can’t make ends meet. Our senators must put Alaska families first. I urge Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan to pass the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act now.

— Sara Buckingham, Eagle River

https://www.adn.com/opinions/letters/2024/03/21/letter-child-care-assistance/
Arizona media
Benefits of the CTC

February 7, 2024

Editor: The discourse on expanding the Child Tax Credit through the American Families and Workers Act is steeped in the debate over its short-term impact versus long-term benefits. Critics contend that the bill might disincentivize parents’ workforce engagement and marital commitment. However, this reductionist perspective does not acknowledge various interplaying factors which low-income families must face.

The termination of the CTC expansion in 2021 coincided with a notable drop in employment levels, underscoring the inverse connection between financial support and workforce participation. Specifically, the escalating cost of child care plays a role in drops of employment levels. Opponents also challenge the credit’s efficacy for married parents, invoking “Two-Parent Privilege” based on purported benefits of two-parent households. Yet, societal shifts, such as a focus on individualism and career-oriented lifestyles, contribute significantly to declining marriage rates, with tax incentives being just one factor.

The Social Genome Model’s analysis of 2021 data showed that children of CTC recipients exhibit higher birth weights, improved math and reading scores, and overall enhanced behavior. Recent Urban Institute findings reinforce the long-term benefits, correlating CTC payments with heightened academic achievement and future income predictions for children. Advocating for Congress to prioritize children and bolster intergenerational mobility, the call is to recognize the tangible, enduring positive outcomes of the Expanded Child Tax Credit.

— Karina Garavito, Phoenix

https://www.havasunews.com/opinion/karina-garavito-benefits-of-the-ctc/article_b6c161b2-c63f-11ee-bcfe-6b38761e8bda.html
Senators urged to support act for American families

March 3, 2024

In an era marked by deep political divisions, the recent passing of the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act offers a glimmer of hope that bipartisanship remains possible. A notable provision of this act is the expansion of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) for low-income families. This expansion is critical as it provides much-needed relief to families struggling to make ends meet, particularly amidst rising housing and food costs.

While the bill is not without its flaws, it represents a significant step forward in supporting American families. However, its journey is not complete; it now awaits approval in the Senate. Unfortunately, some senators are hesitant to support even this modest expansion, arguing it is too generous. They propose cuts to family benefits while safeguarding corporate tax breaks — a move that not only denies vital assistance to struggling families but also jeopardizes the bill's passage altogether.

As our senators, Sen. Sinema and Sen. Kelly, return from recess next week, I implore them to champion this bill and urge leadership to bring it to a vote. We cannot afford to squander this opportunity to alleviate the financial burdens faced by countless families across our nation. Let us prioritize the well-being of our children and families by supporting measures that truly make a difference.

— Rayna Castillo, Flagstaff

Urge Senate to Expand the Child Tax Credit

March 3, 2024

Did you know the House approved a bipartisan tax bill, known as the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, that would raise the Child Tax Credit (CTC) for American families? Families earning less than $60,000 could see a $900 yearly increase, providing much-needed relief. Despite this, the bill faces challenges in the Senate from some senators looking to cut CTC benefits in favor of corporate tax breaks. Did you know in 2022, the median CEO compensation package was $14.5 million? The average American makes .3% of the median CEO compensation package. Despite what one may hear through the grapevine, it's important to note that this expansion will not harm employment rates, worsen the budget deficit, or create new benefits for immigrant children. Families are feeling financially strained without Senate alignment & action. It's crucial for senators to prioritize families over politics and swiftly pass the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act. Let's come together to support the CTC expansion and uplift the American people!

— Chloe Harris, East side

https://tucson.com/opinion/article_024731bc-d67a-11ee-b20d-171ba525046b.html
Speak up for action from Congress

Re: the Feb. 24 letter “No accountability.”

Dear Editor,

The letter writer reminds the public and her representative that Congress works for us. Her letter also reminds us of another step we can take when we don’t feel heard: writing a letter to the editor of the Arizona Daily Star. We can also call 202-224-3121, and remind them we need a response. Or perhaps thanking them for the recent tax bill that passed the House, increasing the child tax credit, lifting half a million children out of poverty. This is the perfect time to ask our senators to pass this bill that also will help 16 million struggling Americans. Our voices matter, use yours and together we can make a difference.

— Willie Dickerson, Northwest side

Dear Editor,

William Lambert makes a great argument for helping struggling families by the Senate passing the Child Tax Credit. ('National opinion: Senate must approve expanded child tax credit to fight hunger' by William Lambers, Arizona Daily Star, April 9, 2024)

Battling poverty that millions of families are experiencing should be on the top of Congress’s to do list. The House already passed this bipartisan legislation, the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, and the Senate must do the same. We can help by calling senators, 202-224-3121, and telling them to take action right now, speaking to leadership to bring this critical legislation to a vote. If it doesn’t pass, we will know who doesn’t think families matter in time to vote for someone who does.—

Willie Dickerson, Northwest side

https://tucson.com/opinion/letters/letter-re-the-april-9-article-national-opinion-senate-must-approve-expanded-child-tax-credit/article_f84c8a2c-031f-11ef-beec-67a7b7f005a2.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=user-share
Do your part

June 10, 2024

Re: the June 1 article “Stand up for safer future — my wife, Laura Conover has.”

Aubrey Conover makes good points about people needed to stand up for our country. In addition to running for office, we can question candidates and follow up when they are elected. Using our voices to make sure they know what matters, like the bipartisan Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act that would help millions of families currently struggling in poverty. Or what about asking President Biden for a bold pledge to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, that has provided vaccine for a billion children so far, saving millions of lives. Perhaps the best way is to call on your Senators (202-224-3121) to pass this bill and call on the president for bold Gavi support. It will take all of us to empower our government to take the road to a better country and a better world, please do your part.

— Willie Dickerson, Northwest side

California media
Lawmakers Must Fully Fund the WIC Program

Half of all babies — including mine — rely on this essential program. But unless Congress acts, millions could face food insecurity.

By Candace Baker

February 1, 2024

When my grandmother was raising my cousins and me, she taught us to work hard and go after what we wanted. I didn't know it at the time, but we were in poverty.

Scared of judgment and bureaucracy, my grandmother refused to apply for assistance programs. But that meant she had to work several jobs, day and night, bringing us with her because she couldn't afford child care. We barely got by — and enjoyed no time together outside of work and school.

We thought that's how everyone lived. Your grandma works around the clock and still can't make ends meet. That's life, right? But as I got older, I saw that other kids had new clothes, after-school activities, and time to play.

I wanted that. And most of all, I wanted to help my grandmother so that she could have it too. So I vowed to get a college education and a good-paying job helping others.

WIC not only provides nutritious foods but also nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and even health care referrals for low-income mothers and small children.

If I wanted to achieve my dream of helping my family, I knew I'd have to do something different. I'd heard about a program that helped pregnant and postpartum moms and their babies, the Special Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children, also known as WIC.

I almost didn't apply because when I tried to enroll in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), I ran into the same judgment and bureaucratic stumbling blocks my grandmother feared. But I knew I needed help — and so did my baby.
And let me tell you — WIC was a game-changer!

WIC not only provides nutritious foods but also nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and even health care referrals for low-income mothers and small children. It helps to reduce maternal and infant mortality and improves health outcomes so children have the best chance at a healthy and productive life.

I also was able to get the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help with our food needs. And because of these programs, I was able to go back to school, get my high school diploma, enroll in college, and graduate Magna Cum Laude. I was even able to become a volunteer mentor with a federally funded program called Second Chance to help people who served prison time reenter society in a healthy, productive way.

Families like mine are everywhere — about half of all babies born in the United States benefit from WIC.

It turns out that most of us just need a little help at especially difficult times in our lives. If wages had kept pace with the rising cost of living, rent, and food, perhaps we wouldn't need assistance programs. But wages haven't kept pace with living costs in 50 years.

For the past 25 years, WIC has served every eligible family that applied for its critical services. But now it's in danger — Congress hasn't agreed to fund the program to meet the needs of all who are eligible. There's a $1 billion shortfall, which means that 2 million pregnant and postpartum women and their little ones won't get necessary food and health assistance.

Imagine all those families that will face food insecurity, childbirth complications, and negative impacts on their health and well being that can last a lifetime — even generations.

I now have four children. All four benefited greatly from the WIC program, just as all who are eligible deserve to do. I believe in everything WIC does — I even took a job there helping with breastfeeding support. I'm also an Expert on Poverty at the anti-poverty organization RESULTS. These opportunities allow me to advocate for the programs that supported me when I was in need.
I need your help to ensure that Congress does the same. We must fully fund the WIC program so that no eligible family is turned away.

*Candace Baker is a mother, fierce advocate for anti-poverty programs, and Expert on Poverty at RESULTS from Indianapolis, Indiana.*

Having A Child Shouldn’t Cause Financial Catastrophe

By Lindsay K. Saunders

February 19, 2024

FAMILY PLANNING - I had a baby in 2021 and quickly learned how parenting and child care expenses add up.

My husband and I had saved up for months to afford my unpaid maternity leave — I kept working even after my water broke because we needed every penny. It was a dream come true to have a career that I was proud of and finally be welcoming a child into our lives.

But I had no idea how hard it would really be.

While I was on unpaid maternity leave that cost us our health benefits, my husband was let go from his job. Already reliant on WIC — the federal food aid program for women, infants, and children — we were forced to go to food pantries, apply for Medicaid, and referred to a diaper bank. We were in survival mode: exhausted, stressed out, and worried.

Despite a litany of postpartum complications that continue to plague me more than two years later, I ended up only taking seven weeks of leave before I returned to work out of desperation.

I wondered: Why doesn’t the U.S. have a paid parental leave policy?

Instead, my first and only experience with motherhood was marred by stress and trauma. Again and again, I had to choose between my health and a paycheck, which can feel like a punishment. I’d proudly served my country on a one-year assignment overseas working on foreign aid, and it didn’t matter.

We found child care at a loving, quality child care center, but the tuition kept increasing. Now the monthly cost is almost twice our mortgage. In fact, child care costs exceed college tuition where we live in North Carolina, as well as in at least 27
other states. My stomach gets in a knot every six months when I know the tuition will increase again.

I wondered: Why don’t we invest more in early care and education?

Meanwhile, the crises causing outsized harm to families throughout the pandemic compounded: a diaper shortage, a formula shortage, inflation, and wages that wouldn’t keep up. So many people are struggling to get back on their feet and desperately need balance and some peace of mind. The stress took its toll, and my husband and I separated in spring 2023.

I wondered: If only we’d had more support, would we have made it?

I have an advanced degree and work as a communications director at a nonprofit while also freelancing. After paying for necessities, we have nothing left, so I get food and supplies from neighbors and friends. I work so hard as a single mom to try to achieve the dreams I have for myself and my baby boy — the dreams that all mothers have. I don’t want my child to deal with the stress and constant refrain of “we don’t have the money for that,” like I did growing up.

Families desperately need, want, and deserve better. Welcoming a child should never be the reason a family plunges into poverty, especially in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We shouldn’t be sacrificing health, quality early learning, or stability in exchange for a roof over our heads and food. Instead, we should be building strong foundations and generational wealth for our kids.

We need federally mandated paid parental and medical leave. We need additional dedicated funding for programs like WIC that support over 6 million families.

And we need to continue expanding the Child Tax Credit. In North Carolina alone, the monthly Child Tax Credits received in 2021 helped the families of 140,000 children lift themselves out of poverty. Nationally, the credit cut child poverty by over 40 percent before Congress let the pandemic expansion expire at the end of 2021.

Congress must put our tax dollars and policies toward strong support for families. Let’s ensure no parent experiences welcoming a child as a financial catastrophe and make this country a place where families prosper.
(Lindsay K. Saunders is a North Carolina mother and dedicated advocate for RESULTS Educational Fund, a national anti-poverty organization. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.)

Re: “Lee will leave inspired legacy” (Page A1, March 10).

I was moved by John Woolfolk’s article on Rep. Barbara Lee’s life and legacy after 25 years in Congress.

I consider her a champion in ending poverty. Her wisdom and patience in pushing for effective programs such as the Global Fund to Fight Aids, TB and Malaria, and global vaccination programs (way before COVID), as well as U.S. tax policies like the Child Tax Credit to help people lift themselves out of poverty saved millions of lives. I will miss her as my representative in Congress and hope her successor will be as effective and persistent in her work with congressional colleagues on both sides of the aisle as well as with constituents to fund and expand those worthwhile programs.

Thank you, Rep. Lee, for your love and kindness.

— Susan Oehser, Oakland

https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2024/03/14/letters-1652/

Reprinted in:
The Mercury News
https://www.mercurynews.com/2024/03/14/letters-1652/
Rents Are Too High Nationwide: A Renters' Tax Credit Would Help

A monthly tax credit that capped housing costs at 30 percent of income could keep millions of Americans—including me—in our homes.

By Ashley Dines

April 11, 2024

I spent my first birthday in a shelter. Decades later, after doing all I was supposed to do to lift myself up out of poverty, I’m sofa hopping with my children.

I live in Las Vegas, where I work on a program helping low-income women and children find support to keep a roof over their heads and food in their bellies. When I enrolled in the program myself, the supervisors recognized my ability to lead and offered me this job.

I love my work, and the pay is solidly above minimum wage. Given my humble beginnings, anyone would say I’m a success story. Except I’m currently homeless.

There is no state or county in the United States where someone working full-time at minimum wage can afford a modest two-bedroom apartment.

Rents are astronomically high. In Las Vegas, the average household now needs to make at least $70,000 a year to afford rent. I make a decent full-time salary—but not that much.

It’s not a problem unique to me or to Vegas. According to the Low-Income Housing Coalition, there is no state or county in the United States where someone working full-time at minimum wage can afford a modest two-bedroom apartment.

When a huge chunk of your paycheck goes to rent or the mortgage, there’s little leftover for an emergency. And most Americans—56 percent of us—can’t pay for an unexpected emergency of $1,000. A surprise dental bill, medical bill, or car repair can send us spiraling into poverty.
That’s what happened to me. My mother had to be hospitalized, I separated from my children's father, and my car broke down. I lost everything — almost literally overnight.

I first had to help my mother. She was my childcare provider, but she’s now disabled. Then my cell phone bill payments lapsed for two months, and I had to pay in full to keep my only source of communication turned on. I had to fix my car to get to work and get the kids where they needed to go. Legal bills piled up from trying to secure custody and child support.

I quickly fell behind on rent. The next thing I know, the constable was at my door — forcing me, my two kids, and my disabled mother out of the apartment and down the stairs. That proved too challenging for my mother, and I had to take her back to the hospital immediately.

Again, I work full time and make decent money. But many people are like me — we fall into the gap where our income is too high for assistance but too low for living.

**Many people are like me — we fall into the gap where our income is too high for assistance but too low for living.**

Often, just a little bit of help could keep us from falling into homelessness, joblessness, or worse. If rental assistance were expanded to people making less than a housing wage, or if the pandemic-era expanded Child Tax Credit were still in place, I wouldn’t have been evicted.

We need to bring that expanded Child Tax Credit back. Antipoverty organizations are also calling for a new Renter’s Tax Credit.

Unlike homeowners who get a mortgage tax credit, renters don’t get any tax benefit for paying month after month. With a Renter’s Tax Credit, renters who pay more than 30 percent of our paychecks on housing would get a monthly credit to bring their housing costs down to that percentage.

That would help more of us stay in our homes, keep our jobs, and afford basics like food and child care. It could also reduce the need for more complicated safety net supports.
April is National Fair Housing Month. If we want everyone to have a fair chance to thrive, we can start now by ensuring access to stable, affordable housing.

This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

The opinions expressed here are solely the author’s and do not reflect the opinions or beliefs of the LA Progressive.

Ashley Dines is a mother of two and an expert on poverty with RESULTS from Las Vegas, Nevada.

https://www.laprogressive.com/housing-and-homlessness/rents-are-too-high-nationwide
Colorado media
Children and poverty don’t belong in the same sentence

April 10, 2024

Fintan Steele poses some basic questions about working together, which requires a commitment to openness and flexibility. (“Is working together toward a shared set of truths even possible anymore?” by Fintan Steele, Daily Camera, April 3, 2024.) One key is the shared set of truths, that we all agree on. Recently the House of Representatives passed the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act with an overwhelming bipartisan majority. Could it be because 16 million American children who would have a better future, including half a million lifted out of poverty? Seems like helping children is something we agree upon. But in the two months since this ladder out of poverty passed the House, the Senate has not considered the bill. Same two parties that cooperated in the House and joined together to pass this compassionate bill. Sadly it seems, the question of who gets the credit (in an election year) is holding it back. Fortunately, by calling our senators, 202-224-3121, and asking them to pass this powerful piece of legislation, there is still a chance. The children deserve it, even in an election year, no matter who gets the credit.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Wash.

Democracy in action

June 10, 2024

Ms. Ochs’ challenging trip to Washington shows how a determined advocate can create more understanding with members of Congress, hopefully leading to action (“Ms. Ochs goes to Washington,” May 28). That is democracy in action.

Any of us can make this trip to the nation's capital to meet and speak with our members of Congress to advocate for things that make a difference. Whether it is advocating to expand and protect the SNAP program, ensuring a bold pledge to fund Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance — improving access to vaccines for children in the poorest countries — or encouraging the Senate to pass the bipartisan Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act helping millions of families that are struggling in poverty, it matters.

Ms. Ochs’ inspiration reminds us we all have the privileges and responsibilities of living in a democracy.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Washington

https://boulderweekly.com/opinion/letters-june10/
Florida media
Congress must expand Child Tax Credit

January 9, 2024

The holidays are a time when many look back at what they accomplished over the last year. When it comes to members of Congress, there is little to celebrate from 2023. They did little more than keep the lights on.

The most recent census data shows that child poverty is rising dramatically, primarily because of cuts to the Child Tax Credit for families with low income. Yet, did Congress lift a finger in 2023 to help kids get out of poverty? Not one.

In 2024, our children deserve better. In January, congressional leaders hope to pass new tax breaks for corporations. If that tax package does not include an expansion of the CTC that significantly reduces child poverty, it should be rejected.

For the new year, instead of big promises and little progress, members of Congress should talk less and do more. They can start by putting our children first and expanding the Child Tax Credit.

— Doreen Perry, Winter Park

The Child Tax Credit Changed My Life. Bring It Back.

By Clara Moore

January 21, 2024

From childhood on, I’ve spent my life haunted by the ghost of poverty.

A myth exists in America that financial well-being follows if we just work hard and make good choices. But it's not that simple. At some point, most of us face unforeseen obstacles — from physical or mental health challenges to lost jobs, economic downturns, and natural disasters.

Along with low wages and other structural causes of poverty, that puts financial well-being out of reach for about 140 million people in this country, the Poor People’s Campaign estimates.

The reality of poverty isn't even close to the stereotype propagated by politicians who want only to fund the military and subsidize the rich while cutting everything else. This isn't a lifestyle one chooses by being lazy and getting fat off some mythical government largesse.

For many of us, poverty means working multiple low-wage jobs and still being short on rent, child care, food, or the energy bill. Poverty means you don’t have stable transportation and live in fear of anyone in your family needing health care.

It means your children go without good winter boots or new clothes because you need the lights to stay on. It means there's no time or money for anything beyond the scrape of daily life — no waterparks, no road trips, no relief.

People don’t choose this lifestyle. It’s created by policymakers who prioritize corporate profit and bloated military spending over investing in families in this country. Yet they expect poor people to be the ones who feel ashamed.
At one point I was living the American Dream. I'd been a successful chef, even bought a house at 23. But the 2008 collapse flipped my mortgage upside down, and the single investment I'd been able to make for my future crumbled.

A few years later, after the birth of my child, I was cast back into the same poverty I'd grown up with. Programs like Medicaid, SNAP, and WIC — the program to support women, infants, and children — kept our heads above water while I returned to university to complete an unfinished Bachelor's degree. But our heads dipped under a few times. It was exhausting.

By the time I'd completed a graduate program and we'd eked out some stability, the pandemic hit. But this time, the help was different.

The expanded and enhanced Child Tax Credit in President Biden’s American Rescue Plan not only helped me pay my rent and monthly bills — it helped me be a better mom. Relieved of some financial anxiety, I could spend more time with my daughter and commit to the post-graduate job search, ultimately getting the good job that I have today.

Now I'm financially stable for the first time in my life. But tens of millions of others won't get that same chance unless lawmakers act. Congress let the expanded Child Tax Credit expire at the end of 2021, even though it had cut child poverty in half. Subsequently, child poverty immediately skyrocketed — a disaster.

But now, Congress again has a chance to expand the Child Tax Credit in a tax package that may pass soon. Frustratingly, the package gives more tax breaks to corporations that already pay little to no taxes, even as it modestly expands the Child Tax Credit again — although by less than before — and improves the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the new credit would lift 400,000 children out of poverty, make 3 million children less poor, and help a substantial number of the remaining 19 million poor children currently excluded from the full benefit.
It's necessary, but not enough — too much money in the bill goes to corporations that don't need it. Again, investment priorities are skewed in favor of the wealthy and corporations.

It's only when we prioritize the well-being of families that we will see families thrive.

*Clara Moore is a researcher and mom who lives in Newark, New Jersey. She shares her experiences in poverty as an advocate with RESULTS Educational Fund. All opinions expressed are her own and do not represent her employer.*

[https://flaglerlive.com/the-child-tax-credit-changed-my-lifebring-it-back/#gsc.tab=0](https://flaglerlive.com/the-child-tax-credit-changed-my-lifebring-it-back/#gsc.tab=0)
The child tax credit changed my life; lawmakers have a chance to bring it

By Clara Moore

January 30, 2024

From childhood on, I've spent my life haunted by the ghost of poverty.

A myth exists in America that financial well-being follows if we just work hard and make good choices. But it's not that simple. At some point, most of us face unforeseen obstacles — from physical or mental health challenges to lost jobs, economic downturns and natural disasters.

Along with low wages and other structural causes of poverty, these obstacles put financial well-being out of reach for about 140 million people in this country, the Poor People's Campaign estimates.

The reality of poverty isn't even close to the stereotype propagated by politicians who want only to fund the military and subsidize the rich while cutting everything else. This isn't a lifestyle one chooses by being lazy and getting fat off some mythical government largesse.

For many of us, poverty means working multiple low-wage jobs and still being short on rent, child care, food or the energy bill. Poverty means you don't have stable transportation and live in fear of anyone in your family needing health care.

It means your children go without good winter boots or new clothes because you need the lights to stay on. It means there's no time or money for anything beyond the scrape of daily life — no waterparks, no road trips, no relief.

People don't choose this lifestyle. It's created by policymakers who prioritize corporate profit and bloated military spending over investing in families in this country. Yet they expect poor people to be the ones who feel ashamed.
At one point, I was living the American dream. I’d been a successful chef, even bought a house at 23. But the 2008 collapse flipped my mortgage upside down, and the single investment I’d been able to make for my future crumbled.

A few years later, after the birth of my child, I was cast back into the same poverty I’d grown up with. Programs like Medicaid, SNAP and WIC — the program to support women, infants and children — kept our heads above water while I returned to university to complete an unfinished bachelor’s degree. But our heads dipped under a few times. It was exhausting.

By the time I’d completed a graduate program and we’d eked out some stability, the pandemic hit. But this time, the help was different.

The expanded and enhanced Child Tax Credit in President Joe Biden’s American Rescue Plan not only helped me pay my rent and monthly bills — it helped me be a better mom. Relieved of some financial anxiety, I could spend more time with my daughter and commit to the post-graduate job search, ultimately getting the good job that I have today.

Now, I’m financially stable for the first time in my life. But tens of millions of others won’t get that same chance unless lawmakers act. Congress let the expanded Child Tax Credit expire at the end of 2021, even though it had cut child poverty in half. Subsequently, child poverty immediately skyrocketed — a disaster.

But now, Congress again has a chance to expand the Child Tax Credit in a tax package that may pass soon. Frustratingly, the package gives more tax breaks to corporations that already pay little to no taxes, even as it modestly expands the Child Tax Credit again — although by less than before — and improves the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the new credit would lift 400,000 children out of poverty, make 3 million children less poor, and help a substantial number of the remaining 19 million poor children currently excluded from the full benefit.
It's necessary, but not enough — too much money in the bill goes to corporations that don't need it. Again, investment priorities are skewed in favor of the wealthy and corporations.

It's only when we prioritize the well-being of families that we will see families thrive.

Clara Moore is a researcher and mom who lives in Newark, New Jersey. She shares her experiences in poverty as an advocate with RESULTS Educational Fund. All opinions expressed are her own and do not represent her employer. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

https://www.sun-sentinel.com/2024/01/30/the-child-tax-credit-changed-my-life-lawmakers-have-a-chance-to-bring-it-back-opinion/
Elected officials must take a bold approach on addressing affordable housing issues

January 31, 2024

In response to Jim Croteau's Your Turn, I want to emphasize how alarming the housing issue is. We've seen dramatic increases in rent prices after the COVID-19 pandemic but minimum improvement in living wages, which creates housing insecurity and can lead to homelessness.

The government introduced several initiatives for affordable housing, but most of these programs are inadequately funded and have long waiting lists. Combined with other efficiency issues, few families benefit from these programs while the rest must make do. The lack of stable housing impacts multiple areas in life, such as childcare and employment, and if we want to see our state thriving, we must demand bold actions from our officials and hold them accountable.

The idea to involve local universities to build safer and accessible neighborhoods is promising, but it will only target people affiliated with these establishments. Families outside that circle would still struggle with rising rent prices and pay 50% or more of their income. As we see more apartment complexes built around the city, affordable housing options should increase as well. This way, more people will retain stable employment, balance their income, and rent, and contribute to the housing market.

— Daiana Surkova, Tallahassee

No online link
Time for Renters’ Tax Credit

April 7, 2024

By Ashley Dines

I spent my first birthday in a shelter. Decades later, after doing all I was supposed to do to lift myself up out of poverty, I’m sofa hopping with my children.

I live in Las Vegas, where I work on a program helping low-income women and children find support to keep a roof over their heads and food in their bellies. When I enrolled in the program myself, the supervisors recognized my ability to lead and offered me this job.

I love my work, and the pay is solidly above minimum wage. Given my humble beginnings, anyone would say I’m a success story. Except I’m currently homeless.

Rents are astronomically high. In Las Vegas, the average household now needs to make at least $70,000 a year to afford rent. I make a decent full-time salary — but not that much.

It's not a problem unique to me or to Vegas. According to the Low-Income Housing Coalition, there is no state or county in the United States where someone working full-time at minimum wage can afford a modest two-bedroom apartment.

When a huge chunk of your paycheck goes to rent or the mortgage, there’s little leftover for an emergency. And most Americans — 56 percent of us — can't pay for an unexpected emergency of $1,000. A surprise dental bill, medical bill, or car repair can send us spiraling into poverty.

That’s what happened to me. My mother had to be hospitalized, I separated from my children’s father, and my car broke down. I lost everything — almost literally overnight.
I first had to help my mother. She was my childcare provider, but she’s now disabled. Then my cell phone bill payments lapsed for two months, and I had to pay in full to keep my only source of communication turned on. I had to fix my car to get to work and get the kids where they needed to go. Legal bills piled up from trying to secure custody and child support.

I quickly fell behind on rent. The next thing I know, the constable was at my door — forcing me, my two kids, and my disabled mother out of the apartment and down the stairs. That proved too challenging for my mother, and I had to take her back to the hospital immediately.

Again, I work full time and make decent money. But many people are like me — we fall into the gap where our income is too high for assistance but too low for living.

Often, just a little bit of help could keep us from falling into homelessness, joblessness, or worse. If rental assistance were expanded to people making less than a housing wage, or if the pandemic-era expanded Child Tax Credit were still in place, I wouldn't have been evicted.

We need to bring that expanded Child Tax Credit back. Antipoverty organizations are also calling for a new Renter's Tax Credit.

Unlike homeowners who get a mortgage tax credit, renters don’t get any tax benefit for paying month after month. With a Renter’s Tax Credit, renters who pay more than 30 percent of our paychecks on housing would get a monthly credit to bring their housing costs down to that percentage.

That would help more of us stay in our homes, keep our jobs, and afford basics like food and child care. It could also reduce the need for more complicated safety net supports.

April is National Fair Housing Month. If we want everyone to have a fair chance to thrive, we can start now by ensuring access to stable, affordable housing.

_Ashley Dines is a mother of two and an expert on poverty with Results from Las Vegas, Nevada._

[https://flaglerlive.com/time-for-renters-tax-credit/#gsc.tab=0](https://flaglerlive.com/time-for-renters-tax-credit/#gsc.tab=0)
I Run a Food Pantry. Without Food Stamps, It’s Not Enough.

By Carla Ventura

May 12, 2024

I run a food pantry. I’m proud of the work we do. But if lawmakers passed a liveable minimum wage or invested more in programs like SNAP, people wouldn’t need to rely on pantries like mine.

Pantries are a critical piece of the anti-hunger puzzle, but they’re filler pieces. Government nutrition programs — with the infrastructure and funding to get the job done — should be the centerpiece.

I grew up on food stamps, called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. My mother worked hard, but her wages were too low to meet our basic needs. Sometimes we felt embarrassed pulling out the stamps at the register — I worried kids would talk about me at school.

But the aid was a blessing. It helped keep us from hunger. Even still, food stamps weren’t designed to last the whole month. Most months, we had to travel long distances — often outside our county — to find food pantries so we could get by.

SNAP is the nation’s most effective anti-hunger program, feeding nearly a quarter of all U.S. children. The program reduces hunger by about 30 percent, improves long-term educational, health, and economic outcomes for children, and helps address systemic racial disparities in poverty.

SNAP is the first line of defense in a down economy. In fact, food insecurity fell to a record low of 10.2 percent in 2021 — in the middle of the pandemic — due to the pandemic-era boost in SNAP benefits. But now that those benefits have expired, nearly 13 percent of us experience food insecurity.
For many Americans, wages are simply too low. To meet basic needs in South Carolina, where I live, two adults with two children must earn over $21 per hour. But our state minimum wage is just $7.25.

A person would have to work 106 hours a week at that wage to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment here. Actually, the minimum wage isn't enough to cover the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the country.

Over 44 million Americans rely on SNAP to combat hunger. Yet some members of Congress are proposing cutting the program by a whopping $30 billion over the coming decade. South Carolina alone, which is among the top 10 states with the greatest food insecurity, would suffer $400 million in cuts.

That would be devastating for families like mine.

I'm a single mother with three kids. At age three, one of my sons was diagnosed with autism, and I couldn't find affordable daycare that could accommodate his needs. Every week, I had to leave work at a moment's notice to help him or rush him home. I couldn't sustain employment. I needed help during that challenging time, and SNAP provided it.

I now run a food pantry, Food for All, where I've seen that I'm far from alone.

I listen to the stories of people who come here and share my own to ease their feelings of embarrassment. I breathe a sigh of relief with them when they tell me, “Now I can afford my medication,” “Now I can make rent,” or “Now I don't have to choose between feeding my child and getting her new shoes.”

But other times, I have to watch those who've waited in long lines for an hour be turned away because the food has run out. I can't possibly get enough food donations to meet the enormous need.

But I won't give up. None of us can.

That's why I continue to fight for robust funding — and against the proposed slashing — of SNAP. People shouldn't have to rely on food pantries to feed themselves or their families.
We know what works. We saw how hunger decreased during the pandemic when it had been forecast to skyrocket because we invested in the well-being of families. We must do that again.

_Carla Ventura is a mother, founder of the nonprofit Food for All, and an Expert on Poverty with RESULTS from Columbia, South Carolina._

[https://flaglerlive.com/food-pantry-snap/#gsc.tab=0](https://flaglerlive.com/food-pantry-snap/#gsc.tab=0)
Hawai‘i media
Let's put an end to ‘shameful situation’

February 15, 2023

Nicholas Kristof’s exposé on the neglect of America’s children is shocking (“We Americans neglect our children,” Tribune-Herald, Feb. 8).

Fortunately, there are solutions, including one that is on the way to the Senate after passing the House. This is a call to action for us to make a difference by calling on our senators to pass this legislation that will expand the child tax credit, lifting 400,000 children out of poverty.

Why not send them Mr. Kristof’s opinion piece and ask them to make sure this shameful situation our children face comes to an end?

Together, we can make it an issue that matters so Congress will pass this and other initiatives to end the scourges of poverty in the world’s richest country.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Wash.

https://www.hawaiitribune-herald.com/2024/02/15/opinion/your-views-for-february-15-7/
Idaho media
Crapo’s playing politics with popular child tax credit

By Lauren Necochea

May 17, 2024

It matters how we invest our federal dollars. Americans rely on these funds to deliver everything from transportation and national defense to health care and education. It also matters that we collect revenue in a fair way that builds a strong middle class. Our child tax credit helps in two ways. First, it ensures our tax code never pushes working families into poverty. Second, it gives families a boost to their finances when they are raising kids and need it the most. Unfortunately, bipartisan legislation to strengthen the credit is now being held up by Senator Mike Crapo.

The child tax credit has long been one of the nation’s strongest tools to give tens of millions of families breathing room. Enacted in 1997, the credit provides up to $2,000 per child annually to about 40 million families every year. The American Rescue Plan signed into law by President Biden made it even more impactful. For the first time, the maximum credit was available to lower-income families that previously received only a portion. Monthly payments offered stability for families facing fluctuating finances over the year. These temporary enhancements cut child poverty in half while benefiting 428,000 children in Idaho alone.

The pending bipartisan legislation would restore credit improvements and nudge thousands of Idaho kids above the poverty line while spurring economic growth. The Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act would again allow families with lower wages access portions of the credit they have been blocked from receiving. It also adjusts the credit for inflation starting in 2025 to keep pace with the cost of living.

Other key investments of the bipartisan plan include spurring business investment in domestic research and development, incentivizing the supply of affordable homes to
families with modest incomes, and providing relief to taxpayers devastated by natural
disasters.

Despite the clear benefits, Mike Crapo, the ranking Republican on the Senate Finance
Committee, is holding up the legislation, even as Democrats attempt to compromise.

Crapo's move is particularly disappointing considering his previous support for the
child tax credit. As a member of the U.S. House, he backed the original credit in 1997
and voted to temporarily increase it in 2017 when a Republican was in the White
House. His about-face reflects two trends within today's Republican Party. First, the
GOP is increasingly blatant in its prioritization of tax giveaways for the rich over
building up the middle class. Second, the GOP consistently blocks legislation that
helps Americans if a Democrat is in the White House.

While Mike Crapo plays politics with the family budgets Idahoans use to put food on
the table, Democrats will continue working toward a fair tax code and thriving
children.

Lauren Necochea is a Democrat representing Idaho’s District 19, House Seat A.

Lauren Necochea, of Boise, is a Democrat representing Idaho’s District 19, House Seat A.

[Submission of this op-ed was facilitated by RESULTS staff and ally organizations.]

https://www.idahostatejournal.com/townnews/legislation/opinion-crapo-s-playing-
politics-with-popular-child-tax-credit/article_a0964b3c-13a6-11ef-9acb-fb3beb7dde80.html
Illinois media
How child tax credit changes lives — Clara Moore

By Clara Moore

January 26, 2024

From childhood on, I've spent my life haunted by the ghost of poverty.

A myth exists in America that financial well-being follows if we just work hard and make good choices. But it's not that simple. At some point, most of us face unforeseen obstacles — from physical or mental health challenges to lost jobs, economic downturns, and natural disasters.

Along with low wages and other structural causes of poverty, that puts financial well-being out of reach for about 140 million people in this country, the Poor People's Campaign estimates.

The reality of poverty isn't even close to the stereotype propagated by politicians who want only to fund the military and subsidize the rich while cutting everything else. This isn't a lifestyle one chooses by being lazy and getting fat off some mythical government largesse.

For many of us, poverty means working multiple low-wage jobs and still being short on rent, child care, food, or the energy bill. Poverty means you don't have stable transportation and live in fear of anyone in your family needing health care.

It means your children go without good winter boots or new clothes because you need the lights to stay on. It means there's no time or money for anything beyond the scrape of daily life — no water parks, no road trips, no relief.

People don't choose this lifestyle. It's created by policymakers who prioritize corporate profit and bloated military spending over investing in families in this country. Yet they expect poor people to be the ones who feel ashamed.
At one point I was living the American Dream. I'd been a successful chef, even bought a house at 23. But the 2008 collapse flipped my mortgage upside down, and the single investment I'd been able to make for my future crumbled.

A few years later, after the birth of my child, I was cast back into the same poverty I'd grown up with. Programs like Medicaid, SNAP, and WIC — the program to support women, infants, and children — kept our heads above water while I returned to university to complete an unfinished Bachelor's degree. But our heads dipped under a few times. It was exhausting.

By the time I'd completed a graduate program and we'd eked out some stability, the pandemic hit. But this time, the help was different.

The expanded and enhanced Child Tax Credit in President Biden's American Rescue Plan not only helped me pay my rent and monthly bills — it helped me be a better mom. Relieved of some financial anxiety, I could spend more time with my daughter and commit to the post-graduate job search, ultimately getting the good job that I have today.

Now I'm financially stable for the first time in my life. But tens of millions of others won't get that same chance unless lawmakers act. Congress let the expanded Child Tax Credit expire at the end of 2021, even though it had cut child poverty in half. Subsequently, child poverty immediately skyrocketed — a disaster.

But now, Congress again has a chance to expand the Child Tax Credit in a tax package that may pass soon. Frustratingly, the package gives more tax breaks to corporations that already pay little to no taxes, even as it modestly expands the Child Tax Credit again — although by less than before — and improves the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the new credit would lift 400,000 children out of poverty, make 3 million children less poor, and help a substantial number of the remaining 19 million poor children currently excluded from the full benefit.

It's necessary, but not enough — too much money in the bill goes to corporations that don't need it. Again, investment priorities are skewed in favor of the wealthy and corporations.
It's only when we prioritize the well-being of families that we will see families thrive.

*Clara Moore is a researcher and mom. This article was distributed by OtherWords.org.*

Lawmakers must fully fund WIC program — Candace Baker

By Candace Baker
February 19, 2024

When my grandmother was raising my cousins and me, she taught us to work hard and go after what we wanted. I didn't know it at the time, but we were in poverty.

Scared of judgment and bureaucracy, my grandmother refused to apply for assistance programs. But that meant she had to work several jobs, day and night, bringing us with her because she couldn't afford child care. We barely got by — and enjoyed no time together outside of work and school.

We thought that's how everyone lived. Your grandma works around the clock and still can't make ends meet. That's life, right? But as I got older, I saw that other kids had new clothes, after-school activities, and time to play.

I wanted that. And most of all, I wanted to help my grandmother so that she could have it too. So I vowed to get a college education and a good-paying job helping others.

If I wanted to achieve my dream of helping my family, I knew I'd have to do something different. I'd heard about a program that helped pregnant and postpartum moms and their babies, the Special Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children, also known as WIC.

I almost didn't apply because when I tried to enroll in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), I ran into the same judgment and bureaucratic stumbling blocks my grandmother feared. But I knew I needed help — and so did my baby.

And let me tell you — WIC was a game-changer.

WIC not only provides nutritious foods but also nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and even health care referrals for low-income mothers and small children. It
helps to reduce maternal and infant mortality and improves health outcomes so children have the best chance at a healthy and productive life.

I also was able to get the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help with our food needs. And because of these programs, I was able to go back to school, get my high school diploma, enroll in college, and graduate Magna Cum Laude. I was even able to become a volunteer mentor with a federally funded program called Second Chance to help people who served prison time reenter society in a healthy, productive way.

Families like mine are everywhere — about half of all babies born in the United States benefit from WIC.

It turns out that most of us just need a little help at especially difficult times in our lives. If wages had kept pace with the rising cost of living, rent, and food, perhaps we wouldn't need assistance programs. But wages haven't kept pace with living costs in 50 years.

For the past 25 years, WIC has served every eligible family that applied for its critical services. But now it's in danger — Congress hasn't agreed to fund the program to meet the needs of all who are eligible. There's a $1 billion shortfall, which means that 2 million pregnant and postpartum women and their little ones won't get necessary food and health assistance.

Imagine all those families that will face food insecurity, childbirth complications, and negative impacts on their health and well being that can last a lifetime — even generations.

I now have four children. All four benefited greatly from the WIC program, just as all who are eligible deserve to do. I believe in everything WIC does — I even took a job there helping with breastfeeding support. I’m also an Expert on Poverty at the anti-poverty organization RESULTS. These opportunities allow me to advocate for the programs that supported me when I was in need.

I need your help to ensure that Congress does the same. We must fully fund the WIC program so that no eligible family is turned away.
Candace Baker is an advocate for anti-poverty programs and expert on poverty at RESULTS in Indianapolis. This article was distributed by OtherWords.org.

Commentary: Lawmakers should spend a night in a homeless shelter

By Tiffany Tagbo

April 29, 2024

I grew up walking the fine line of having something and nothing all at the same time. I've experienced tumultuous times as an adult, and I've worked with people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

I grew up walking the fine line of having something and nothing all at the same time. I've experienced tumultuous times as an adult, and I've worked with people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

If there's one thing I could tell lawmakers, it would be to bring back the expanded, monthly, fully refundable Child Tax Credit.

Those monthly payments of up to $300 per child cut child poverty nearly in half in just a few months. And when the credit expired in late 2021, child poverty immediately shot back up. So we know it works.

Lawmakers are now considering a more modest expansion. It doesn't go far enough, but it could lift another 400,000 kids out of poverty — children like the ones I worked with.

I grew up walking the fine line of having something and nothing all at the same time. I've experienced tumultuous times as an adult, and I've worked with people experiencing poverty and homelessness. I can tell lawmakers firsthand no matter which side of the coin families end up on, legislation and programs such as the Child Tax Credit, SNAP, WIC and other safety net programs make a difference.

When I was growing up, my mother worked several minimum-wage jobs and relied on social programs to fill the gaps left by low wages. As a result, my siblings and I never
had to sleep on the streets, go to school hungry, or wear tattered clothing like many children do.

With that help, I went on to graduate from the University of Central Oklahoma with a bachelor’s degree. Eventually, I became a child welfare investigator at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services following up on claims of neglect and abuse.

While I saw some of both, many of these cases were simply the conditions of poverty. Many caseworkers had never experienced poverty and couldn’t make the distinction, but I could. Unfortunately, poverty landed many children in the child welfare system.

With decent pay and benefits, I was able to buy a house. But the work was soul-crushing and I eventually burned out.

You do everything right, and still — boom! You’re knocked right down. One day you are employed with a good salary and benefits, the next you are unemployed without the means to afford the basics, even with a college degree. Married, pregnant, and unable to find decent work, I relied on SNAP and Medicaid to get by — barely.

My job changed, but the clients I work with haven’t.

Poverty puts them in impossible situations. They must choose between food or shelter, medical care or poor health, running water or electricity. It’s a vicious cycle of suffering.

Without a fixed address or help navigating the system, families can’t always access assistance programs that would help them.

A newer bipartisan tax proposal before the Senate would help. It would modestly expand the Child Tax Credit, lifting 400,000 kids out of poverty and helping 16 million overall.

The bill passed the House with an overwhelming bipartisan majority but has stalled in the Senate, where some senators are blocking it for political gain. Families deserve better. The time for delay is over. The Senate needs to vote.

I challenge lawmakers to live on the $6 a day that SNAP recipients do, or to come and spend just one night in a shelter. Once they experience these hardships, they’ll restore
the expanded Child Tax Credit faster than they can say “expand it.” Perhaps this should be a requirement of the job.

We must make our voices heard and speak for those who are silenced and often left out of policy discussion.

We must restore the Child Tax Credit expansion and ensure the thriving of all children.

_Tiffany Tagbo is a mother of two from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and an expert on poverty issues. This article was distributed by OtherWords.org._

Stop playing politics with Child Tax Credit

May 4, 2024

To the editor:

In response to the recent piece in your Commentary section, "Lawmakers Should Spend a Night in a Homeless Shelter," by Tiffany Tagbo:

Expansions to the Child Tax Credit are one of the best and most meaningful tools we have to fight child poverty. It's time to call out the unwillingness of the Senate to give this legislation a vote.

The Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act (HR 7024) passed the House with overwhelming bipartisan support back in January. This bill includes modest expansions to the CTC that are projected to help 16 million kids in families with low incomes, including 5.8 million children under the age of 6.

The only reason that the tax package is still stalled in the Senate going on three months now is that a small band of opponents is blocking it in order to advance their own political ambitions. Times are tough, and a lot of parents are doing their best to put food on the table and pay the rent. For all their effort, they are still struggling to provide for their children. They deserve better than political games by wealthy politicians.

Senators Duckworth and Durbin have voiced their support for CTC expansions in the past, and we need their voices again to urge party leadership to set a vote on the HR 7024 now.

─ Joanna DiStefano, Morgantown, West Virginia

Bill would help moms

May 15, 2024

Moms are great. They love us, care for us, laugh with us, cry with us. Mother's Day was our way to say thanks for all that moms do for us.

But not every mom has it easy. Millions of moms work and strive every day to care for their families, but poverty and indifference thwart their efforts.

But help could be on the way. H.R. 7024, the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act expands the Child Tax Credit for 16 million children in families with low income. It provides moms (and dads) much-needed financial resources to help support their families. The bill has broad bipartisan support but a small group of senators are using their influence to block it. Moms deserve better.

In the wake of Mother's Day 2024, I urge our senators to stand up for moms and their kids by demanding a vote on H.R. 7024 and passing it ASAP.

— Barbara Sullivan, Arlington Heights

‘Transformational advocacy’ goes a long way

May 31, 2024

The headline “transformational advocacy” is so true (“How ‘transformational advocacy’ helped 3 Chicago-area residents find purpose, not fractured politics” by Sam Daley-Harris).

For the last 30-plus years, I have been volunteering with RESULTS and have seen the changes my voice helped to bring about, like greatly reducing the number of children dying every day from preventable causes. I learned how our government works and how I could play a positive role to guide Congress to make a difference.

Currently, the bipartisan Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act would help 16 million children in low-income families meet basic needs. It already passed the U.S. House, and I am working with my senators to do the same. I get to work with great people of all ages.

The best way to avoid depression and the feeling of powerlessness is to take action. Mr. Daley-Harris’ book is a great place to start, or just join one of the groups he founded.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Washington

Indiana media
Hoosier Mom: Bring Back Expanded Child Tax Credit

April 23, 2024

By Joe Ulery

Indiana News Service

INDIANA — The U.S. House has approved a measure to expand the Child Tax Credit. It would help 16 million children from low-income families in Indiana and nationwide. Despite bipartisan support, the bill is stalled in the Senate. Advocates praise the credit's pivotal role in combating child poverty, pointing to its effectiveness in the past, and especially during the pandemic, when it was broadly expanded.

Candace Baker, an Indianapolis mother of 4, said the previous tax-credit expansion worked for her family, and she wants it reinstated.

“Having a child, and I had to get on some government-assistance programs. My grandmother never did because she just didn't want that stigma over her, but I utilized those services when I had a child. I didn't want to either, but I'm like, I need this support,” she explained.

Congress approved expanding the Child Tax Credit in 2021. However, the expansion has expired, leaving families without vital assistance. As the Senate deliberates, pressure mounts on lawmakers to prioritize the needs of struggling families and secure passage. Opponents believe taxpayers who don't work should not be eligible. Some Republicans also contend the provision may incentivize parents to leave the workforce.

Families reeling from the pandemic received between $300 and $360 per month per child from the expanded tax credit. It lifted 3.7 million children from poverty. Baker currently works for a food bank in Indianapolis where she says she is able to help neighbors in need and give back to the community.

“Being able to be a voice for those who have no voice — that is my motto. Even though where you start, you don't have to stay there. So, that is my biggest motto that
I stand on: You may start here, you may be on government assistance, you may be in poverty, but that does not have to be your end game,” she said.

Families who benefited from the increased aid were more than twice as likely to pay their overdue rent during the initial stages of the pandemic. The Child Tax Credit did not pass in time for this year’s tax deadline, and its prospects for the future are uncertain.


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Lebanon Reporter
https://www.reporter.net/indiana/news/hoosier-mom-bring-back-expanded-child-tax-credit/article_2aae39e6-07c3-11ef-9ded-a397b0b978.html
Iowa media
Lawmakers must fully fund the WIC program

February 2, 2024

When my grandmother was raising my cousins and me, she taught us to work hard and go after what we wanted. I didn't know it at the time, but we were in poverty.

Scared of judgment and bureaucracy, my grandmother refused to apply for assistance programs. But that meant she had to work several jobs, day and night, bringing us with her because she couldn't afford child care. We barely got by — and enjoyed no time together outside of work and school.

We thought that's how everyone lived. Your grandma works around the clock and still can't make ends meet. That's life, right? But as I got older, I saw that other kids had new clothes, after-school activities, and time to play.

I wanted that. And most of all, I wanted to help my grandmother so that she could have it too. So I vowed to get a college education and a good-paying job helping others.

If I wanted to achieve my dream of helping my family, I knew I'd have to do something different. I'd heard about a program that helped pregnant and postpartum moms and their babies, the Special Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children, also known as WIC.

I almost didn’t apply because when I tried to enroll in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), I ran into the same judgment and bureaucratic stumbling blocks my grandmother feared. But I knew I needed help — and so did my baby.

And let me tell you — WIC was a game-changer!

WIC not only provides nutritious foods but also nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and even health care referrals for low-income mothers and small children. It helps to reduce maternal and infant mortality and improves health outcomes so children have the best chance at a healthy and productive life.
I also was able to get the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help with our food needs. And because of these programs, I was able to go back to school, get my high school diploma, enroll in college, and graduate Magna Cum Laude. I was even able to become a volunteer mentor with a federally funded program called Second Chance to help people who served prison time reenter society in a healthy, productive way.

Families like mine are everywhere — about half of all babies born in the United States benefit from WIC.

It turns out that most of us just need a little help at especially difficult times in our lives. If wages had kept pace with the rising cost of living, rent, and food, perhaps we wouldn't need assistance programs. But wages haven't kept pace with living costs in 50 years.

For the past 25 years, WIC has served every eligible family that applied for its critical services. But now it's in danger — Congress hasn't agreed to fund the program to meet the needs of all who are eligible. There's a $1 billion shortfall, which means that 2 million pregnant and postpartum women and their little ones won't get necessary food and health assistance.

Imagine all those families that will face food insecurity, childbirth complications, and negative impacts on their health and well being that can last a lifetime — even generations.

I now have four children. All four benefited greatly from the WIC program, just as all who are eligible deserve to do. I believe in everything WIC does — I even took a job there helping with breastfeeding support. I'm also an Expert on Poverty at the anti-poverty organization RESULTS. These opportunities allow me to advocate for the programs that supported me when I was in need.

I need your help to ensure that Congress does the same. We must fully fund the WIC program so that no eligible family is turned away.

*Candace Baker is a mother, fierce advocate for anti-poverty programs, and Expert on Poverty at RESULTS from Indianapolis, Indiana. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*
Maine media
I recently read a piece in the Portland Press Herald about increasing awareness and urging Mainers to claim tax credits for which they are eligible. The article touched on the Child Tax Credit, which was expanded during the pandemic and now has the potential to provide support to more children once again. With H.R. 7024, recently passed in the House and now approaching the Senate, still on the line, Maine voters should not only know their eligibility for tax credits from previous years, they should look toward a far more impactful goal — real change at the federal level.

The economic turmoil of the past two years has hit children, one of our most vulnerable populations, most significantly.

My thanks to U.S. Rep. Chellie Pingree for voting to pass this essential bill in the House. Though the bill is imperfect, I urge our senators to do the same. Passing H.R. 7024 in the Senate is an opportunity for Sens. Collins and King to advocate for their constituents and expand the Child Tax Credit for children living in Maine and beyond.

— Natalie Jones, Stockton Springs

Mainers count on SNAP to feed their families

June 23, 2024

My first job after college involved living in Chicago as a member of AmeriCorps VISTA. For the uninitiated, the AmeriCorps VISTA stipends are based on the poverty rate of the area you are serving. In Chicago in 2018, this meant a bi-weekly allowance of just over $500. To a single person in their early 20s completing their first professional job, this was minimal — for someone supporting their family, it would be unimaginable. From first-hand experience, federal programs that allow low-income individuals to supplement this type of income are essential.

That's why the recently approved 2024 Farm Bill is so disappointing. While House Committee on Agriculture members publicly celebrate bipartisan approval, the Thrifty Food Plan and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program changes will be devastating for our neighbors who rely on this support. Under this plan, tens of billions of dollars will be eliminated over the next decade, uniformly impacting tens of millions of people across the United States. People like my former self.

If this change is difficult to imagine, know that almost 185,00 SNAP recipients reside in Maine. Every child in Maine currently receives free lunch, and many need additional programs to avoid food insecurity at home and during the summer. These are the neighbors of the singular Maine representative on the House Committee on Agriculture, Chellie Pingree, and these are the people whose lives will be significantly impacted by the changes to the 2024 Farm Bill. We must ask our representatives in the House and the Senate not to support the changes that will result in such significant loss to our current and future communities.

— Natalie Jones, Stockton Springs

Maryland media
U.S. must expand federal Child Tax Credit

April 21, 2024

Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen recently reversed a decision to forego summer grocery aid for low-income families in his state and admitted that “what’s best for our kids” is that they have enough food. Nice thinking, Governor.

The Baltimore Sun’s article about how some states are choosing to reject Summer EBT, federal money that would buy children food in the summer, makes plain a simple truth (“Another red-blue divide: Money to feed kids in the summer,” April 12). Whether they live in a state with a governor who listens (like the gentleman from Nebraska), or in one of the 10 states that have declined the federal nutrition money, a family that gets a federal Child Tax Credit would have more money to feed their kids.

The CTC has already proven its worth. It demonstrably lowers child poverty. According to the Maryland Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services’ “Results for Child Well-Being 2023 Annual Report,” 14% of Maryland kids live in poverty. That’s 14% too many, especially in a relatively prosperous state like ours.

U.S. Sens. Ben Cardin and Chris Van Hollen support this proven idea. The U.S. House of Representatives has already passed H.R. 7024, the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, a bill with bipartisan support that includes expansion of the Child Tax Credit. Now, they need to use their legislative muscle to persuade your colleagues to schedule a U.S. Senate vote. Summer is coming and kids need to eat!

─ Jan Kleinman, Baltimore

https://www.baltimoresun.com/2024/04/21/expand-federal-child-tax-credit/
Massachusetts media
Lawmakers must fully fund the WIC program

By Candace Baker

February 12, 2024

When my grandmother was raising my cousins and me, she taught us to work hard and go after what we wanted. I didn't know it at the time, but we were in poverty.

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If I wanted to achieve my dream of helping my family, I knew I'd have to do something different. I'd heard about a program that helped pregnant and postpartum moms and their babies, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, also known as WIC.

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It turns out that most of us just need a little help at especially difficult times in our lives. If wages had kept pace with the rising cost of living, rent, and food, perhaps we wouldn't need assistance programs. But wages haven't kept pace with living costs in 50 years.

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*Candace Baker is a mother, fierce advocate for anti-poverty programs, and expert on poverty at RESULTS from Indianapolis. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*
We must prevent a decrease of WIC funding due to congressional inaction

February 17, 2024

To the editor: We rapidly approach March 1, when millions of women and infants may lose their nutrition benefits as WIC — the special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children — runs out of funding due to the 2024 budget negotiations.

“If funded at the same level as the January 2024 continuing resolution, WIC would face a shortfall of $1 billion, equivalent to 1.5 months of benefits for the nearly 6.7 million people that rely on the program,” according to the deputy under secretary for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services and the assistant secretary for health for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. That shortfall would mean 2 million pregnant and postpartum women and their children won’t get necessary food and health assistance.

This one of many problems arising from congressional dysfunction should be a nonpartisan issue: decreasing child poverty and nourishing women and children. Yet it has become a victim of Congress’ inaction. Our future depends on the wellbeing of our children, which in turn depends on healthy nutrition prenatally and after.

Recently, the House passed a bipartisan tax package including an expansion of the child tax credit, 357-70. The Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024 expands the credit over the next three years so that more families with low incomes, including those with multiple children, can access the full credit amount. This would ensure that 16 million children receive some amount of this benefit. And we know from the 2021 expanded credit that this money contributes to decreasing food insecurity.

Now, with no time to spare, we must push the Senate to pass this law as well.

As one of the wealthiest nations in the world, it is a travesty for us to rank so poorly on measures like child poverty, infant and maternal mortality, and food insecurity. We
can and must do better. I invite you to not only participate actively in the upcoming elections but to continue to advocate for these measures post election. We have the privilege of constituency, which means that our voices are counted when reaching out to our legislators. They are in Congress because of us and to work for us.

— Leslye Heilig, Great Barrington

The writer is the Massachusetts Group co-leader of RESULTS.org, a nonpartisan anti-poverty advocacy organization.

Having A Child Shouldn’t Cause Financial Catastrophe

Author: Lindsay K. Saunders, OtherWords.org

February 19, 2024

In the wealthiest country on earth, welcoming a child should be a joy for families — not a financial trauma.

I had a baby in 2021 and quickly learned how parenting and child care expenses add up.

My husband and I had saved up for months to afford my unpaid maternity leave — I kept working even after my water broke because we needed every penny. It was a dream come true to have a career that I was proud of and finally be welcoming a child into our lives.

But I had no idea how hard it would really be.

While I was on unpaid maternity leave that cost us our health benefits, my husband was let go from his job. Already reliant on WIC — the federal food aid program for women, infants, and children — we were forced to go to food pantries, apply for Medicaid, and referred to a diaper bank. We were in survival mode: exhausted, stressed out, and worried.

Despite a litany of postpartum complications that continue to plague me more than two years later, I ended up only taking seven weeks of leave before I returned to work out of desperation.

I wondered: Why doesn’t the U.S. have a paid parental leave policy?

Instead, my first and only experience with motherhood was marred by stress and trauma. Again and again, I had to choose between my health and a paycheck, which can feel like a punishment. I’d proudly served my country on a one-year assignment overseas working on foreign aid, and it didn’t matter.
We found child care at a loving, quality child care center, but the tuition kept increasing. Now the monthly cost is almost twice our mortgage.

In fact, child care costs exceed college tuition where we live in North Carolina, as well as in at least 27 other states. My stomach gets in a knot every six months when I know the tuition will increase again.

I wondered: Why don’t we invest more in early care and education?

Meanwhile, the crises causing outsized harm to families throughout the pandemic compounded: a diaper shortage, a formula shortage, inflation, and wages that wouldn’t keep up. So many people are struggling to get back on their feet and desperately need balance and some peace of mind. The stress took its toll, and my husband and I separated in spring 2023.

I wondered: If only we’d had more support, would we have made it?

I have an advanced degree and work as a communications director at a nonprofit while also freelancing. After paying for necessities, we have nothing left, so I get food and supplies from neighbors and friends. I work so hard as a single mom to try to achieve the dreams I have for myself and my baby boy — the dreams that all mothers have. I don’t want my child to deal with the stress and constant refrain of “we don’t have the money for that,” like I did growing up.

Families desperately need, want, and deserve better. Welcoming a child should never be the reason a family plunges into poverty, especially in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We shouldn’t be sacrificing health, quality early learning, or stability in exchange for a roof over our heads and food. Instead, we should be building strong foundations and generational wealth for our kids.

We need federally mandated paid parental and medical leave. We need additional dedicated funding for programs like WIC that support over 6 million families.

And we need to continue expanding the Child Tax Credit. In North Carolina alone, the monthly Child Tax Credits received in 2021 helped the families of 140,000 children lift themselves out of poverty. Nationally, the credit cut child poverty by over 40 percent before Congress let the pandemic expansion expire at the end of 2021.
Congress must put our tax dollars and policies toward strong support for families. Let's ensure no parent experiences welcoming a child as a financial catastrophe and make this country a place where families prosper.

*Lindsay K. Saunders is a North Carolina mother and dedicated advocate for RESULTS Educational Fund, a national anti-poverty organization. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*

Child Tax Credit

March 25, 2024

How long must families wait? It’s been nearly two months since the House passed a bipartisan expansion of the Child Tax Credit and sent it to the Senate. Estimates are that this bill will benefit 16 million children in families with low incomes, including 5.8 million kids under the age of six.

You would think that in an election year, Congress would be eager to pass a tax cut for families (and small businesses). But a few senators are blocking it for political gain. Families should not have to wait months for Congress to pass something that is both popular and necessary.

It is time for senators to show us their hands. If the bill passes, families win. If it fails, senators can explain to voters why they chose to keep children in poverty.

When the Senate returns to Washington after Easter, I urge our senators to demand an immediate vote and then vote YES on the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act.

— William Deignan, Medford

https://www.bostonherald.com/2024/03/25/letters-to-the-editor-601/
I spent my first birthday in a shelter. Decades later, after doing all I was supposed to do to lift myself up out of poverty, I'm sofa hopping with my children.

I live in Las Vegas, where I work on a program helping low-income women and children find support to keep a roof over their heads and food in their bellies. When I enrolled in the program myself, the supervisors recognized my ability to lead and offered me this job.

I love my work, and the pay is solidly above minimum wage. Given my humble beginnings, anyone would say I'm a success story. Except I'm currently homeless.

There is no state or county in the United States where someone working full-time at minimum wage can afford a modest two-bedroom apartment.

Rents are astronomically high. In Las Vegas, the average household now needs to make at least $70,000 a year to afford rent. I make a decent full-time salary—but not that much.

It's not a problem unique to me or to Vegas. According to the Low-Income Housing Coalition, there is no state or county in the United States where someone working full-time at minimum wage can afford a modest two-bedroom apartment.

When a huge chunk of your paycheck goes to rent or the mortgage, there's little leftover for an emergency. And most Americans — 56 percent of us — can't pay for an unexpected emergency of $1,000. A surprise dental bill, medical bill, or car repair can send us spiraling into poverty.

That's what happened to me. My mother had to be hospitalized, I separated from my children's father, and my car broke down. I lost everything — almost literally overnight.
I first had to help my mother. She was my childcare provider, but she’s now disabled. Then my cell phone bill payments lapsed for two months, and I had to pay in full to keep my only source of communication turned on. I had to fix my car to get to work and get the kids where they needed to go. Legal bills piled up from trying to secure custody and child support.

I quickly fell behind on rent. The next thing I know, the constable was at my door — forcing me, my two kids, and my disabled mother out of the apartment and down the stairs. That proved too challenging for my mother, and I had to take her back to the hospital immediately.

Again, I work full time and make decent money. But many people are like me — we fall into the gap where our income is too high for assistance but too low for living.

Often, just a little bit of help could keep us from falling into homelessness, joblessness, or worse. If rental assistance were expanded to people making less than a housing wage, or if the pandemic-era expanded Child Tax Credit were still in place, I wouldn’t have been evicted.

We need to bring that expanded Child Tax Credit back. Antipoverty organizations are also calling for a new Renter’s Tax Credit.

Unlike homeowners who get a mortgage tax credit, renters don’t get any tax benefit for paying month after month. With a Renter’s Tax Credit, renters who pay more than 30 percent of our paychecks on housing would get a monthly credit to bring their housing costs down to that percentage.

That would help more of us stay in our homes, keep our jobs, and afford basics like food and child care. It could also reduce the need for more complicated safety net supports.

April is National Fair Housing Month. If we want everyone to have a fair chance to thrive, we can start now by ensuring access to stable, affordable housing.

https://www.bostonherald.com/2024/04/13/dines-renters-need-tax-credit-to-ease-sky-high-costs/
To the editor: With Memorial Day recently in mind, take a moment and ponder these statistics.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 11 percent of veterans aged 18 to 64 experienced food insecurity from 2015 to 2019. And 1.2 million veterans lived in households who participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) between 2017 and 2019, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

These numbers are truly distressing. We can and should do better by our veterans.

Beyond veterans, the number of households with children experiencing food insecurity was at a record low of 12.5 percent in 2021 — primarily due to pandemic relief policies then in place — but increased to 17.3 percent by 2022 when those programs expired. In large part, these numbers could again be reversed if the Senate would pass the bipartisan Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, which passed the House months ago by a vote of 357 to 70. This would expand the child tax credit and reduce the number of children in poverty by 500,000, benefiting 16 million children in families who do not currently receive the full child tax credit. Coincident with this, food insecurity would decrease.

Currently, the House Agriculture Committee is marking up the Farm Bill. One of the controversial issues being advanced would arbitrarily restrict future updates to the Thrifty Food Plan, which is the basis for the food benefits. If this change takes place, over the next decade we would see a decrease of $30 billion in food assistance via SNAP. This is unacceptable in a nation with our resources.

Both SNAP and the child tax credit support our local economies. The USDA estimates that in a weak economy, $1 in SNAP benefits generates $1.50 in economic activity. In our local communities, we see SNAP benefits being used to purchase nutritious locally
sourced foods, benefiting those families as well as our local farmers. In Massachusetts, more than a third of SNAP recipients are in working families. This is not a handout but rather a hand up.

— Leslye Heilig, Great Barrington

The writer is the Massachusetts group co-leader of RESULTS.org, a nonpartisan anti-poverty advocacy group.

We’re waiting for the Senate to act on enhanced federal Child Tax Credit

June 5, 2024

Columnist Renée Loth (“In Somerville, guaranteed basic income provides a safety net,” Opinion, May 2) and reporter Esmy Jimenez (“Guaranteed income boosts working class: Cambridge program shows benefit of popular vouchers,” Page A1, May 28) have written recently about two Massachusetts cities that are piloting programs to provide certain residents with monthly assistance. Studies have demonstrated that guaranteed basic income decreases poverty. The problem is that these supports are time-limited, and once they end, recipients return to being in or on the edge of poverty.

We can do better. Guaranteed basic income of a relatively small amount can make a world of difference. So too can policies such as the enhanced Child Tax Credit. We have the opportunity now, if only the Senate would pass the federal Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act. Several months ago this measure passed the House by a huge 357-70 vote. There was broad bipartisan support for this since the number of children in poverty would be reduced by 500,000 and 16 million children in families who do not currently receive the full Child Tax Credit would benefit.

The American Rescue Plan Act in 2021, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, reduced child poverty by about 46 percent. We know that these approaches are effective policies.

It’s a travesty that the United States ranks 31st on child poverty out of 34 nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. We can change this now.

— Dr. Leslye Heilig, Great Barrington

The writer, a retired pediatrician, is Massachusetts group coleader with the advocacy organization Results.
Missouri media
The importance of home

By Kazmyn Ramos

January 4, 2024

Too many of us have to depend on sheer good luck to make it — especially when it comes to putting a roof over our heads.

We grow up hearing that hard work alone will lift us above the hardships we’re born into. But many of us also watched as our parents worked two and three jobs, relied on extended family to watch us, and still struggled to afford stable housing. Far too many of us are living that same struggle ourselves.

It’s not that we aren’t resourceful. My grandmother, who barely scraped by with factory work and countless odd jobs, pulled together with neighbors who supported each other through a mutual aid network. Thanks to her resourcefulness, our community and luck, we had someplace to call home. That gave my mother the chance to become the first one in our family to go to college. I followed in her footsteps to attend graduate school.

We made it work. But I’ve learned through generational poverty that the lack of affordable housing is one of the biggest obstacles to thriving. I learned even more through my work with Healthy Families, a national, research-backed program.

I conducted home visits with low-income mothers, addressing maternal health, birth outcomes and child development. Their poverty was different from what I grew up with. Many of these mothers were immigrants with language barriers and no access to the extended networks, mutual aid, or stable housing that I had.

Evictions were rampant. I saw conditions that you wouldn’t believe existed in the richest country in the world.

I’m a strong believer in mutual aid. But in the world’s wealthiest nation, should we really have to rely solely on working people sharing their meager resources among
themselves? To eradicate poverty and housing instability, we’re going to need more than that.

Nationally, a worker would need an hourly wage of at least $28.58 to afford a modest two-bedroom rental — or nearly $24 an hour for just one bedroom. The federal minimum wage is $7.25 per hour. Almost half of low-income renters spend over 30% of their incomes on housing alone.

Building on my mother and grandmother’s work in mutual aid, I’ve found community engagement to be invaluable — not only to connect families to housing, but also to organize our collective voices to push lawmakers toward solutions.

Solutions like building more affordable housing, more public housing, and more housing in general. Guaranteeing workers a living wage for their hard work. Making sure we have a strong social safety net so families can survive lean times.

Unfortunately, housing policy often takes human rights and the need for community out of the policy process. It focuses on zoning, commerce, profit-maximization and “protecting” wealthy communities from low-income neighbors. This does a disservice to the rich sense of community affordable housing can create.

Housing should be seen as a human right and a community builder, not a wealth builder. It should be a way to lift us all up rather than segregate us and perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

The more we separate ourselves from our fellow humans, the more damage we do to all of us as a society. My mother and grandmother taught me that. I bet yours did too. So let’s work together to make the dream of housing for all a reality.

Kazmyn Ramos is a program manager for an NGO that delivers cash to people in poverty, and is founder of the affordable housing nonprofit Seeking 1610, and a Poverty Expert at RESULTS. She lives in Indianapolis. This was distributed by OtherWords.org and is reprinted with permission.

https://www.columbiamissourian.com/opinion/guest_commentaries/the-importance-of-home/article_8f61fca2-ab24-11ee-9b7f-53f3f6108c4f.html
Support childhood tax credits for low-income families

January 8, 2024

I applaud your editorial, “Good start toward feeding hungry kids” (Globe, Jan. 3), which notes that Missouri has tentatively agreed to participate in a federal program that will provide assistance to food insecure students during the summer months.

Another action which Missouri’s U.S. Sens. Josh Hawley and Eric Schmitt can take to address childhood hunger is to support expansion of the Child Tax Credit.

The most recent census data shows that childhood poverty is rising dramatically, primarily because prior extensions to the Child Tax Credit were allowed to lapse, which led to the exclusion of 19 million children from the program’s full benefits.

Evidence shows that when such benefits are provided, they are used for things like rent and food, thus reducing childhood poverty and hunger.

As Congress reconvenes this month, it is critical that the Child Tax Credit be extended to reach low-income families.

— Greg Campbell, Creve Coeur

https://www.joplinglobe.com/opinion/support-childhood-tax-credits-for-low-income-families/article_0cedd458-ae4e-11ee-88fe-6b3b8b4e53b3.html
Expand Child Tax Credit For Low-Income Families

January 22, 2024

The Jan. 5 Webster-Kirkwood Times notes the tax benefits available for older Americans (“Aging Taxpayers May be Eligible for Tax Breaks.”) While this group certainly deserves such breaks, low-income families also need financial relief. As Congress works on the FY2024 spending bill, it has the opportunity to expand the Child Tax Credit in a way that will allow coverage for more children in low-income families.

When the last Child Tax Credit expansion expired in 2021, 19 million children were excluded from the program, and child poverty increased dramatically. Congressional leaders must address this mistake and reinstate coverage for low-income families.

Missouri Senators Josh Hawley and Eric Schmitt should support current bipartisan efforts to include an expanded Child Tax Credit in any final spending proposal.

— Greg Campbell, Creve Coeur

Much-needed expansion of the Child Tax Credit

March 2, 2024

Dear Editor,

I am writing to express my heartfelt commendation to the House of Representatives for passing the much-needed expansion of the Child Tax Credit. This pivotal legislation promises to alleviate the financial burdens of countless families across our nation, providing them with essential support in these challenging times.

The expanded Child Tax Credit is not just a financial relief but a significant investment in the future of our children. By making it easier for parents to afford necessities like food, clothing, and educational resources, we are laying a stronger foundation for the next generation to thrive. It's heartening to see our representatives recognize the importance of supporting families and taking concrete steps to ensure the well-being of our children.

As the bill moves to the Senate, I urge Sen. Jason Bean to consider the profound impact this expansion can have on families in our community and across the country. Sen. Bean's support is crucial in turning this bill into law, and I strongly encourage him to stand with the House of Representatives in championing the needs of our children and families.

We must come together, regardless of our political affiliations, to prioritize the welfare of our nation’s children. I am hopeful that Sen. Bean will reflect on the long-term benefits of this legislation and lend his support to ensure its passage in the Senate.

I urge all readers to reach out to Sen. Bean and express their support for the Child Tax Credit expansion. Together, we can make a significant difference in the lives of our families and secure a brighter future for our children.

With respect,

Jessica Sicley, Harviell

https://www.darnews.com/story/3031063.html
How long must families wait? It’s been nearly two months since the House has passed a bipartisan expansion of the Child Tax Credit and sent it to the Senate. Estimates are that this bill will benefit 16 million children in families with low incomes, including 5.8 million kids under the age of six.

You would think that in an election year, Congress would be eager to pass a tax cut for families (and small businesses). But a few senators are blocking it for political gain. Families should not have to wait months for Congress to pass something that is both popular and necessary.

It is time for senators to show us their hands. If the bill passes, families win. If it fails, senators can explain to voters why they chose to keep children in poverty.

When the Senate returns to Washington after Easter, I urge our senators to demand an immediate vote and then vote YES on the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act.

— Suzanne Marienau, Ozark, MO

https://www.bransontrilakesnews.com/perspectives/article_c8188bba-eb84-11ee-ad9e-2f6e153c2c27.html
Push senators to approve stalled Child Tax Credit in Congress

May 9, 2024

There's a partial solution to the issues raised in "America's child care crisis is holding back moms without college degrees" (April 27), and it is sitting on the U.S. Senate floor. In January, U.S. House passed the “Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act,” sponsored by Rep. Jason Smith, R-Mo.

Through its Child Tax Credit, this game-changing bill is anticipated by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities to benefit 27% of American children in rural areas. Notably, more than one-third of Missouri’s 6 million residents live rurally.

As a female student who conducted Ph.D. research at Washington University, I cherish the opportunities this tax credit would provide to working Missouri mothers — in defraying child care costs, alleviating rent burden, and clearing access to work or even school.

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research reports that single mothers in Missouri with an associate or bachelor’s degree are significantly more likely to escape poverty, forgo public assistance, and contribute back to their communities financially. With Mother’s Day approaching, please join me in calling Missouri Sens. Josh Hawley and Eric Schmitt at (202) 224-3121 and asking them to be vocal champions of Rep. Smith's Child Tax Credit and tax relief act on the Senate floor.

— Diane Karloff, St. Louis

Stagnating U.S. Senate bill could further aid Missouri educational outcomes

May 9, 2024

There is another avenue to support our K-12 students as “Missouri education funding lags behind” (published April 8), and it is sitting on the U.S. Senate floor.

Over 90 days ago, the House of Representatives passed the “Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act,” sponsored by Rep. Jason Smith (R-Missouri). Through its Child Tax Credit, this game-changing bill is anticipated by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities to benefit 27% of American children under 17 in rural areas. Notably, more than one-third of Missouri’s 6 million residents live rurally.

As a recent graduate who conducted Ph.D. research at Washington University, I cherish the opportunities this tax credit would provide to Missouri families in support of their children’s education and well-being.

COVID-era policies drove nationwide child poverty to a record low of 5.2% in 2021, but as federal funding elapsed, levels have risen back to 12.4%. In 2021, families largely used the surplus to cover basic needs, including food, clothing and school supplies.

We must take action before this legislation expires because childhood poverty can drastically hinder brain development. To further assist K-12 students, please join me in calling Missouri’s Sens. Josh Hawley and Eric Schmitt at (202) 224-3121 and asking them to be vocal champions of Rep. Smith’s Child Tax Credit and tax relief act on the Senate floor.

*Diane Karloff is a resident of the St. Louis and completed chemistry Ph.D. research at Washington University.*

https://www.columbiamissourian.com/opinion/letters_to_the_editor/stagnating-u-s-senate-bill-could-further-aid-missouri-educational-outcomes/article_6cabc0e4-0d8f-11ef-9464-a3735f37d385.html
Press Congress to protect SNAP, expand benefits for hunger

May 30, 2024

Meredith Knopp laid out the statistics about hunger in our area well in his letter to the editor “Higher prices are driving hunger in America. You can help.” (May 23). Hungry Missourians need our help. I’m inspired by that letter to make another donation to the St. Louis Area Foodbank and write about an additional way to help.

The Farm Bill is our nation’s most important national food system legislation. It contains the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP) that helps low-income Americans to access nutrition.

As Congress works to renew our food and farm programs through the Farm Bill, our members of Congress should use their influence to protect SNAP from funding cuts and further restrictions. They should also increase funding for fresh produce within SNAP benefits through the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP). Remind them that we are all depending on them.

Please join me in reaching out to Missouri Sens. Josh Hawley and Eric Schmitt as well as Reps. Cori Bush, Ann Wagner, and Blaine Luetkemeyer to urge them to pass a Farm Bill this year that protects SNAP and expands GusNIP. They owe it to Missouri to fight for us.

— Cynthia Levin, Town and Country

https://www.stltoday.com/opinion/letters/letter-press-congress-to-protect-snap-expand-benefits-for-hunger/article_65c5f5ea-1d3b-11ef-a00f-fb3c3a8afe5c.html
Food insecurity

June 3, 2024

Memorial Day is a day we honor Americans who died in our military service, but it also makes me think about veterans still living among us. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 11% of veterans aged 18-64 experienced food insecurity from 2015 to 2019. And 1.2 million veterans lived in households that participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) between 2017 and 2019, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. These numbers are distressing. Protecting SNAP benefits can help us give our veterans the care they deserve.

Currently, the U.S. House Agriculture Committee is marking up the Farm Bill that contains SNAP policy. One of the controversial issues being debated would restrict future updates to the Thrifty Food Plan, the basis for the food benefits. If this change takes place, over the next decade we'd see a decrease of $30 billion in SNAP food assistance!


— Cynthia Levin

https://www.westnewsmagazine.com/opinion/food-insecurity/article_cdd63b3c-21b3-11ef-962a-ab2649fceb37.html
Low-income families need more food aid

June 20, 2024

I was glad to see your coverage about additional nutrition funding coming to Missouri families even if it will be a wait before we see that increase. (“Missouri and Kansas families will be getting money for kids' summer meals – eventually” June 6, 2024) Sometimes fixing food policy requires playing the long game, even though families are desperate for help now.

An example of long-range policy is happening right now as congressional committees debate the details of the U.S. Farm Bill, our most important national food system legislation. It contains the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that helps low-income Americans access nutritious foods. Our members of Congress should protect SNAP from funding cuts and further restrictions. They should also increase funding for fresh produce within SNAP benefits through the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP).

Please write or call Senators Hawley and Schmitt as well as Representative Smith to urge them to pass a Farm Bill this year that protects SNAP and expands GusNIP. We need to creatively use all our policies to help our most vulnerable neighbors.

– Cynthia Changyit Levin

https://www.phelpscountyfocus.com/opinion/article_e4fa503c-2f0a-11ef-bfb8-2fe57a268318.html
Nevada media
I had a baby in 2021 and quickly learned how parenting and child care expenses add up. My husband and I had saved up for months to afford my unpaid maternity leave — I kept working even after my water broke because we needed every penny. It was a dream come true to have a career that I was proud of and finally be welcoming a child into our lives.

But I had no idea how hard it would really be.

While I was on unpaid maternity leave that cost us our health benefits, my husband was let go from his job. Already reliant on WIC — the federal food aid program for women, infants, and children — we were forced to go to food pantries, apply for Medicaid, and referred to a diaper bank. We were in survival mode: exhausted, stressed out, and worried.

Despite a litany of postpartum complications that continue to plague me more than two years later, I ended up only taking seven weeks of leave before I returned to work out of desperation.

I wondered: Why doesn't the U.S. have a paid parental leave policy?

Instead, my first and only experience with motherhood was marred by stress and trauma. Again and again, I had to choose between my health and a paycheck, which can feel like a punishment. I'd proudly served my country on a one-year assignment overseas working on foreign aid, and it didn't matter.

We found child care at a loving, quality child care center, but the tuition kept increasing. Now the monthly cost is almost twice our mortgage. In fact, child care costs exceed college tuition where we live in North Carolina, as well as in at least 27
other states. My stomach gets in a knot every six months when I know the tuition will increase again.

I wondered: Why don’t we invest more in early care and education?

Meanwhile, the crises causing outsized harm to families throughout the pandemic compounded: a diaper shortage, a formula shortage, inflation, and wages that wouldn’t keep up. So many people are struggling to get back on their feet and desperately need balance and some peace of mind. The stress took its toll, and my husband and I separated in spring 2023.

I wondered: If only we’d had more support, would we have made it?

I have an advanced degree and work as a communications director at a nonprofit while also freelancing. After paying for necessities, we have nothing left, so I get food and supplies from neighbors and friends. I work so hard as a single mom to try to achieve the dreams I have for myself and my baby boy — the dreams that all mothers have. I don’t want my child to deal with the stress and constant refrain of “we don’t have the money for that,” like I did growing up.

Families desperately need, want, and deserve better. Welcoming a child should never be the reason a family plunges into poverty, especially in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We shouldn’t be sacrificing health, quality early learning, or stability in exchange for a roof over our heads and food. Instead, we should be building strong foundations and generational wealth for our kids.

We need federally mandated paid parental and medical leave. We need additional dedicated funding for programs like WIC that support over 6 million families.

And we need to continue expanding the Child Tax Credit. In North Carolina alone, the monthly Child Tax Credits received in 2021 helped the families of 140,000 children lift themselves out of poverty. Nationally, the credit cut child poverty by over 40 percent before Congress let the pandemic expansion expire at the end of 2021.

Congress must put our tax dollars and policies toward strong support for families. Let’s ensure no parent experiences welcoming a child as a financial catastrophe and make this country a place where families prosper.

This column was distributed by OtherWords.org.
Housing crisis is national in scope

April 20, 2024

Waldon Swenson’s Vegas Inc guest column April 15 makes a great argument for the benefits of affordable housing (“Affordable housing is a catalyst for sustainable economic growth in Southern Nevada”).

Local initiatives matter, but the affordable housing crisis is a national problem. Congress is considering legislation to increase affordable housing funding, as put forth by Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., Rep. Suzan DelBene, D-Wash., and others.

A renter tax credit is also being considered, so people experiencing poverty won't pay over 30% of their income for rent. We can help these national initiatives pass by calling our representatives and asking them to take action.

It will take both local and national action to turn the tide on housing to create a better future for all.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Washington

New Hampshire media
Expand Child Tax Credit to support mothers

May 14, 2024

To the Editor: Moms are great. They love us, care for us, laugh with us, cry with us. Mother’s Day is our way to say thanks for all that moms do for us.

But not every mom has it easy. Millions of moms work and strive every day to care for their families, but poverty and indifference thwart their efforts.

But help could be on the way. H.R. 7024, the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, expands the Child Tax Credit for 16 million children in families with low income. It provides moms (and dads) much-needed financial resources to help support their families. The bill has broad bipartisan support but a small group of senators are using their influence to block it. Moms deserve better.

As we celebrate Mother’s Day, I urge our senators to stand up for moms and their kids by demanding a vote on H.R. 7024 and passing it ASAP.

— Erline Towner, Milford

New Mexico media
We urgently need national action on the Child Tax Credit

By Roxanne Allen and Heidi Brooks / RESULTS.org

February 5, 2024

Way too many New Mexican children, about one in four, know what it is like to grow up in poverty. Child poverty is not about having the latest game or sneakers. It’s about feeling hunger pangs, feeling scared, and feeling left out of all the good stuff.

Child poverty and its effects hurt families, children, and the finances of our country and our state. A 2019 report from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine found that the realities of child poverty — unstable housing, frequent moves, inadequate nutrition, and high levels of stress — manifest later in life in lower educational attainment, poorer health, and lower earnings in adulthood. A 2018 study from Washington University in St. Louis calculated that child poverty costs the nation $1.03 trillion per year, or 5.4% of GDP. Further, the researchers estimated that every dollar spent on reducing child poverty would save $7 in costs avoided.

The New Mexico Legislature understands and recently passed a state Child Tax Credit, providing families up to $600 per child per year, indexed for inflation. This state level CTC is a welcome help, but we also need national action.

Although tax credits for families with children enjoy bipartisan support, the federal Child Tax Credit has major flaws. For instance, if a family is too low-income, they do not receive the full per-child credit. A single mother of two children who earns $15,000 per year receives a total of $1,875 while a family making $400,000 with two children receives $4,000. Nationally, 19 million children receive less than the full credit; in New Mexico, that number is 168,000.

However, in 2021 we accomplished an amazing success thanks to one legislative act. We dramatically increased the CTC, paid it on a monthly basis, and eliminated income requirements so that even the lowest-income children were able to receive the full benefit. Doing this cut U.S. child poverty by 46% in less than a year, a stunning
outcome. In New Mexico this meant that 252,000 families with 420,000 children benefited with higher, more regular payments. Parents used that money in whatever way they needed most, but most used it for rent, child care, food, medical help, supplemental education, and transportation. And child poverty plummeted.

It is almost unbelievable, then, that the improved benefits were allowed to lapse, erasing most of the gains and putting 3.7 million children back into poverty, the sharpest rise ever of recorded U.S. child poverty rates.

There is some hope for a partial fix. The Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024 (HR 7024) just passed in the U.S. House by a huge margin, 357-70, with all of our House members from New Mexico voting for it. It would lift 500,000 children out of poverty and benefit about 80% of the 19 million children currently not getting full benefits.

Next step is the Senate, where the bill has passed in committee on a bipartisan basis and now needs a vote from the full Senate. New Mexico Sens. Ben Ray Luján and Martin Heinrich should actively engage with colleagues of both parties to secure this help for New Mexico children. Our job as citizens is to thank our House members, encourage our senators to vote for this first step, and plan to work for full benefits for all children next session.

https://www.abqjournal.com/opinion/span-class-print-trim-opinion-span-we-urgently-need-national-action-on-the-child-tax/article_a55f8f4e-c201-11ee-9565-ab1fd28e553c.html
New York media
How long must families wait for child tax credit?

March 26, 2024

To the Editor:

How long must families wait? It’s been nearly two months since the House passed a bipartisan expansion of the Child Tax Credit and sent it to the Senate. Estimates are that this bill will benefit 16 million children in families with low incomes, including 5.8 million kids under the age of 6.

You would think that in an election year Congress would be eager to pass a tax cut for families (and small businesses), but a few senators are blocking it for political gain. Families should not have to wait months for Congress to pass something that is both popular and necessary.

It is time for senators to show us their hands. If the bill passes, families win. If it fails, senators can explain to voters why they chose to keep children in poverty.

When the Senate returns to Washington after Easter, I urge our senators to demand an immediate vote and then vote YES on the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act.

— Sincerely, Susan Joseph Rack, Trumansburg

https://www.fltimes.com/opinion/letters_to_editor/letter-how-long-must-families-wait-for-child-tax-credit/article_32dfe58c-e85c-11ee-9c34-834808ff4910.html
North Carolina media
Child Tax Credit

January 7, 2024

When Congress reconvenes this week, there will be eight working days before the first of two deadlines to fund the government in 2024. There will be much debate about what should be funded. I vote for an expanded child tax credit. The tax code should not punish children because their caregivers have lower wage jobs, are disabled or cannot afford the child care needed to secure a job. I strongly encourage N.C. representatives and senators to back expanding the CTC to ensure this proven aid to lifting children out of poverty is available to those who need it most: families living in rural areas, parents/caregivers with disabilities, military caregivers, grandparents raising grandchildren.

— Patti Maxwell, Cary

https://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/article283756603.html
Lawmakers must fully fund WIC program

February 1, 2024

By Candace Baker

When my grandmother was raising my cousins and me, she taught us to work hard and go after what we wanted. I didn't know it at the time, but we were in poverty.

Scared of judgment and bureaucracy, my grandmother refused to apply for assistance programs. But that meant she had to work several jobs, day and night, bringing us with her because she couldn't afford child care. We barely got by — and enjoyed no time together outside of work and school.

We thought that's how everyone lived. Your grandma works around the clock and still can't make ends meet. That's life, right? But as I got older, I saw that other kids had new clothes, after-school activities and time to play.

I wanted that. And most of all, I wanted to help my grandmother so she could have it too. So I vowed to get a college education and a good-paying job helping others.

If I wanted to achieve my dream of helping my family, I knew I'd have to do something different. I'd heard about a program that helped pregnant and postpartum moms and their babies, the Special Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants and Children, also known as WIC.

I almost didn’t apply because when I tried to enroll in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, I ran into the same judgment and bureaucratic stumbling blocks my grandmother feared. But I knew I needed help — and so did my baby.

WIC not only provides nutritious foods but also nutrition education, breastfeeding support and even health care referrals for low-income mothers and small children. It helps to reduce maternal and infant mortality and improves health outcomes so children have the best chance at a healthy and productive life.
I also was able to get the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to help with our food needs. And because of these programs, I was able to go back to school, get my high school diploma, enroll in college and graduate magna cum laude. I was even able to become a volunteer mentor with a federally funded program called Second Chance to help people who served prison time reenter society in a healthy, productive way.

Families like mine are everywhere — about half of all babies born in the United States benefit from WIC.

It turns out that most of us just need a little help at especially difficult times in our lives. If wages had kept pace with the rising cost of living, rent, and food, perhaps we wouldn't need assistance programs. But wages haven't kept pace with living costs in 50 years.

For the past 25 years, WIC has served every eligible family that applied for its critical services. But now it’s in danger — Congress hasn’t agreed to fund the program to meet the needs of all who are eligible. There's a $1 billion shortfall, which means that 2 million pregnant and postpartum women and their little ones won't get necessary food and health assistance.

Imagine all those families that will face food insecurity, childbirth complications and negative impacts on their health and well-being that can last a lifetime — even generations.

I now have four children. All four benefited greatly from the WIC program, just as all who are eligible deserve to do. I believe in everything WIC does — I even took a job there helping with breastfeeding support. I'm also an expert on poverty at the anti-poverty organization RESULTS. These opportunities allow me to advocate for the programs that supported me when I was in need.

I need your help to ensure that Congress does the same. We must fully fund the WIC program so that no eligible family is turned away.

Candace Baker is a mother, fierce advocate for anti-poverty programs and expert on poverty at RESULTS from Indianapolis, Indiana. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

https://restorationnewsmedia.com/articles/columns-butnercreedmoor/lawmakers-must-fully-fund-wic-program/
Having a child shouldn’t cause financial catastrophe

By Lindsay K. Saunders

February 16, 2024

I had a baby in 2021 and quickly learned how parenting and child care expenses add up.

My husband and I had saved up for months to afford my unpaid maternity leave — I kept working even after my water broke because we needed every penny. It was a dream come true to have a career that I was proud of and finally be welcoming a child into our lives.

But I had no idea how hard it would really be.

While I was on unpaid maternity leave that cost us our health benefits, my husband was let go from his job. Already reliant on WIC — the federal food aid program for women, infants and children — we were forced to go to food pantries, apply for Medicaid and were referred to a diaper bank. We were in survival mode: exhausted, stressed out and worried.

Despite a litany of postpartum complications that continue to plague me more than two years later, I ended up only taking seven weeks of leave before I returned to work out of desperation.

I wondered: Why doesn't the U.S. have a paid parental leave policy?

Instead, my first and only experience with motherhood was marred by stress and trauma. Again and again, I had to choose between my health and a paycheck, which can feel like a punishment. I'd proudly served my country on a one-year assignment working on foreign aid, and it didn't matter.

We found child care at a loving, quality child care center, but the tuition kept increasing. The monthly cost is now almost twice our mortgage. In fact, child care costs exceed college tuition where we live in North Carolina, as well as in at least 27
other states. My stomach gets in a knot every six months when I know the tuition will increase again.

I wondered: Why don’t we invest more in early care and education?

Meanwhile, the crises causing outsized harm to families throughout the pandemic compounded: a diaper shortage, a formula shortage, inflation and wages that wouldn't keep up. So many people are struggling to get back on their feet and desperately need balance and some peace of mind. The stress took its toll, and my husband and I separated in spring 2023.

I wondered: If only we’d had more support, would we have made it?

I have an advanced degree and work as a communications director at a nonprofit while also freelancing. After paying for necessities, we have nothing left, so I get food and supplies from neighbors and friends. I work so hard as a single mom to try to achieve the dreams I have for myself and my baby boy — the dreams that all mothers have. I don’t want my child to deal with the stress and constant refrain of “we don’t have the money for that,” like I did growing up.

Families desperately need, want and deserve better. Welcoming a child should never be the reason a family plunges into poverty, especially in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We shouldn't be sacrificing health, quality early learning or stability in exchange for a roof over our heads and food. Instead, we should be building strong foundations and generational wealth for our kids.

We need federally mandated paid parental and medical leave. We need additional dedicated funding for programs like WIC that support more than 6 million families.

And we need to continue expanding the child tax credit. In North Carolina alone, the monthly child tax credits received in 2021 helped the families of 140,000 children lift themselves out of poverty. Nationally, the credit cut child poverty by over 40% before Congress let the pandemic expansion expire at the end of 2021.

Congress must put our tax dollars and policies toward strong support for families. Let’s ensure no parent experiences welcoming a child as a financial catastrophe and make this country a place where families prosper.
Lindsay K. Saunders is a North Carolina mother and dedicated advocate for RESULTS Educational Fund, a national anti-poverty organization. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.


Reprinted in:

High Food Prices

March 31, 2024

Yesterday's prices are certainly not today's prices when it comes to buying groceries in 2024. While inflation has fallen in some areas, food prices have remained high, causing tighter budgets, especially for those I know who participate in food entitlement programs.

A new farm bill is crucial to food security. Seventy-five percent of the bill goes toward entitlement programs that help individuals, families and seniors get healthy food, with the SNAP program accounting for the largest share.

Last November, Congress passed a one-year extension of the farm bill. It expires Sept. 30, 2024. September is just months away, and for many people, food security fades with each passing month. Battles over the bill have begun. I urge North Carolina’s representatives and senators in Congress to support a new farm bill. The time to act is now.

— Corrine Johnson, Charlotte

https://www.charlotteobserver.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/article287063610.html
Budd, Tillis should move on Child Tax Credit

April 10, 2024

To the Editor:

Thanks for the NCNewsline piece on expanding the Child Tax Credit by Sharon Hirsch (“U.S. Senate should move on Child Tax Credit expansion”, April 4). Ms. Hirsch hits all the right notes. It’s amazing that the 2021 Child Tax Credit, which cut child poverty in half, was allowed to expire. Child poverty more than doubled after that.

The good news is that the U.S. Senate has an opportunity to get us at least part of the way back on child poverty. In January the divided U.S. House of Representatives voted 357-70 to pass HR 7024, Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024. This bill makes some needed improvements to the Child Tax Credit that would benefit over 500,000 North Carolina children and lift 500,000 children out of poverty across the country.

But HR 7024 is stuck in the Senate because of the opposition of a few senators. Senators Thom Tillis and Ted Budd should call on leadership to bring the bill to the floor of the Senate for a vote so that lower-income American families can get the support they need to raise productive future citizens and workers.

─ Ken Patterson, Asheville

https://www.thesylvaherald.com/opinion/letters_to_editor/article_17480cf8-f74f-11ee-bfc0-e3a0088f080d.html
North Dakota media
Rep. Armstrong voted for extension of CTC; hoping Sens. Hoeven and Cramer will do the same

*I thank Armstrong for voting in favor of the CTC expansion, and I ask Senators John Hoeven and Kevin Cramer to also vote yes.*

February 10, 2024

To the Editor:

The front-page article of the Jan. 6, 2024, issue of the Grand Forks Herald featured the dramatic increase in homelessness in North Dakota this past year. For example, at the beginning of the school year, there were 106 homeless students enrolled in Grand Forks Public Schools, an increase over the previous year’s count of 85. If we want our youth to thrive, this is unacceptable. No child should be without a home.

A recent study from the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University reports that now half of all U.S. renters cannot afford to pay their rent. Our nation is facing a rolling crisis in housing that has not been adequately addressed. Both the cost of rent and the cost of a home have increased disproportionately compared with the incomes of most Americans. Homelessness is an inevitable result for the most vulnerable.

Now, Congress is voting on a tax package which includes a partial extension of the child tax credit so our lowest income families can also benefit. Rep. Kelly Armstrong voted in favor of the CTC, which passed in a 357 to 70 vote in the House on Jan. 31. Armstrong stated that the bill, which expands the child tax credit and adjusts it for inflation, is important for North Dakota. Nationwide, it is anticipated that 15 million children from low-income families will benefit.

I thank Armstrong for voting in favor of the CTC expansion, and I ask Senators John Hoeven and Kevin Cramer to also vote yes. I urge our congressional delegation to focus on ending homelessness now.

— Kathleen Ness, Grand Forks
Senate must pass the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act

In North Dakota, an estimated 23,000 children will benefit from the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act.

March 30, 2024

To the Editor:

How long must families wait? It’s been nearly two months since the House has passed a bipartisan expansion of the Child Tax Credit and sent it to the Senate. Estimates are that this bill will benefit 16 million children in families with low incomes, including 5.8 million kids under the age of six. In North Dakota, an estimated 23,000 will benefit.

It would make sense that in an election year, Congress would be eager to pass a tax cut for families (and small businesses). But a few senators are blocking it for political gain. Families should not have to wait months for Congress to pass something that is both popular and necessary.

It is time for senators to show us their hands. If the bill passes, families win. If it fails, senators can explain to voters why they chose to keep children in poverty.

When the Senate returns to Washington after Easter, I urge our senators, Sen. John Hoeven and Sen. Kevin Cramer, to demand an immediate vote and then vote YES on the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act.

— Kathleen Ness, Grand Forks

It's time to protect the next generation from stress

The Gallup 2023 Global Emotions Report showed stress is at near record levels around the world.

By Kathleen Ness

June 12, 2024

For at least a half century, researchers have been investigating what impact stress has on our health and what to do to mitigate it, a topic the National Geographic recently highlighted (June 2024, volume 245). For example, an American Psychological Association (APA) survey in 2023 indicated that the incidence of chronic illnesses and mental health problems are increasing, particularly among those 35 to 44. And Americans are not alone. The Gallup 2023 Global Emotions Report showed stress is at near record levels around the world. Leading neurobiologists, Huda Akil and Eric J. Nestler, call it a second pandemic, the sequel to COVID-19, political instability, climate change and economic stress.

When we have a sense of control over our lives, stress can be managed. Unsurprisingly, severe stress occurs more frequently among marginalized populations, living in impoverished communities unequipped to address it. Our public policy should respond to this urgent crisis.

HOUSING

To thrive, the basic needs of children must be met. Housing stability is foremost. Homelessness undermines a child's ability to develop normally, undermining rapid brain development, which can have long-term negative effects on physical and emotional health. The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program is our largest federally funded affordable housing program for extremely low-income renters, but it is not fully funded. As the Zero to Three, 2023 report indicates, 75% of low-income renters who are caring for a child at home and need help do not receive it. The Grand Forks
Herald noted 106 students enrolled in our public schools were homeless at the beginning of this past school year.

Unaffordable housing can be addressed by a refundable tax credit modeled after the Child Tax Credit (CTC), which boosts household resources and cut U. S. child poverty nearly in half under temporary enhancements in 2021.

**FOOD**

Besides housing, children need regular, nutritious food. The North Dakota Legislature approved a $6 million appropriation last year to provide families of four with incomes at or below $60,000 with free school lunch. Now we need Congress to better fund SNAP so children can have adequate nutrition at home.

Every five years, Congress passes the Farm Bill. This law governs farming and food policies in the United States. Through the Farm Bill, SNAP provides direct assistance to those experiencing food insecurity. The average daily SNAP benefit received is about $7 a day. These limited resources have an outsized impact on the lives of low-income Americans—over 80% of recipients are families with children, older Americans, and persons with disabilities. Increasing SNAP benefits would help mitigate stress.

**MENTAL HEALTH**

The Grand Forks Herald has drawn attention to the high recidivism rates in our local jail and the connection to illicit drug use. It is well documented that these numbers will diminish if we focus on proven prevention and rehabilitation practices. But that requires a strong commitment to prevention.

We can look to Iceland, which went from having the highest rate of adolescent drug use among a group of northern European countries in the 1990s to the lowest. A coalition of social scientists, policy makers, mental health practitioners, and community members collaborated to identify at-risk adolescents, increase parental involvement, and provide at-risk youth with constructive after school activities, among other interventions. They centered their focus on the public schools as a way for the community to bolster youth mental health, and it worked. Perhaps we should learn from them.

**GLOBAL HEALTH**
When the world can come together to create effective treatments and vaccines for a deadly novel virus, there is no excuse for children dying of preventable, treatable conditions like malnutrition or diarrhea. Yet in 2022, 4.9 million children under the age of 5 died largely of preventable causes. And the global food crisis for women and girls, especially, is increasing according to UNICEF.

Children should not have to suffer from things we can easily prevent. I urge our lawmakers to boost funding for global child health, to provide access to good nutrition, lifesaving vaccines, and more. For pennies on the dollar, we can help save millions of young lives. The US was once instrumental in prioritizing global child survival. It’s time to step up again.

**GLOBAL EDUCATION**

Finally, we need to invest in global education. The READ Act Reauthorization Act of 2023 has been introduced in both the House and passed in the Senate (H.R. 681, S.41) This legislation would reauthorize the original 2017 READ Act, promoting global equity in access to education. This is particularly crucial for girls, and will improve the U.S.’s ability to achieve key global education goals.

I ask our members of Congress, Senators John Hoeven and Keven Cramer, and Congressman Kelly Armstrong to join with colleagues across the political aisle to pass legislation that protects the upcoming generation from overwhelming stress.

*Kathleen Ness, of Grand Forks, is a volunteer who lobbies Congress to pass legislation that addresses poverty.*

Ohio media
Expanding the child tax credit to help needy families is the just and fair thing to do

January 08, 2024

As many of us just enjoyed Christmas and this beautiful time of year, I know there are a lot of families that are like mine used to be. We spent our money very carefully, not just at holiday time, but always, because we had such a limited amount. For years, we were always one emergency away from a financial crisis.

Every little bit helped, and I know every little bit can help countless families in Ohio. This is why the child tax credit is so impactful. It can bridge the gap between stability and stress.


It is the just and fair thing to do.

— Dolores Badar, Rocky River

We need a unified Ohio delegation to get the Farm Bill across the finish line

May 1, 2024

Regarding your April 24 editorial on the Farm Bill ("All hands on deck from Ohio's delegation to get Farm Bill Passed? Not quite"), I appreciate the bipartisan effort by most of the Ohio congressional delegation to push the Farm Bill to passage before it expires in September. Farming is the largest industry in Ohio and contributes $124 billion to our economy.

An important part of the Farm Bill is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP. SNAP is essential to 1,491,300 Ohioans or 13% of our population. These are people in families who have children, an older or disabled adult in their household and/or are working low-income jobs.

These workers often don't earn enough since inflation has increased the cost of food. People can’t feed their children, and children who are hungry are not able to grow and learn. Our very workforce and future workers are threatened if SNAP is not available to those in need.

Let's make sure to thank our representatives who prioritize the importance of a robust agricultural industry and a supported, thriving workforce. Let's urge the others to get on board and act quickly to get the Farm Bill across the finish line before it expires.

— Virginia Vogts, Columbus

Oklahoma media
Expand tax credits that directly help working-class families

March 9, 2024

The U.S. House passed the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024, which would restore the expanded child tax credit, which was in place for 2021. It would beef up the credit to $3,600 per child for those under age 6 and $3,000 for older children. It would permanently make the credit fully refundable so more low-income families would qualify. The bill is pending in the U.S. Senate.

In a recent statement from U.S. Sen. Markwayne Mullin, he said, "The federal government needs to incentivize workforce participation, not encourage people to become dependents of the state."

The previous day, WalletHub released the report “Best & Worst States for Women in 2024,” in which Oklahoma ranked 50th among all states and the District of Columbia. It ranked 44th in share of women living in poverty, 50th for insured women and 48th for preventative health care.

How can Mullin incentivize workforce participation when 50.9% of Oklahoma's population live in a state that hinders their ability to earn money, stay healthy and pay for health care?

Tax reliefs are meant to help single mothers working two jobs and still struggle with rent. Tax reliefs ought to be for 65-year-old widows who are physically unable to work and earn a living to pay rent.

Studies from 2021 have debunked the myth that tax credits discourage work. In fact, expansions to the child tax credit helped families maintain employment and even get new jobs.

Tax credits are there to elevate our friends and neighbors out of poverty so they can focus on getting an education instead of worrying about where their next meal is coming from.
As the Senate discusses the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, I urge Mullin and U.S. Sen. James Lankford to stand with our Oklahoma representatives and pass this act. Be the leadership Oklahoma so desperately needs.

— Jacoby Gonzales, Tulsa

https://tulsaworld.com/opinion/letters/letter-expand-tax-credits-that-directly-help-working-class-families/article_a948643c-dcb9-11ee-a5f3-43ebcb1ed3ca.html
Wage war against hunger, poverty

April 16, 2024

In response to: "Oklahoma governor's executive order to put higher education diversity programs under review."

Oklahoma politicians are fighting the wrong war. Instead of waging war on DEI initiatives, Native American tribes, and the so-called “woke movement,” politicians need to focus on waging war against hunger and poverty in the state.

According to Hunger Free Oklahoma, 208,110 children aren’t getting the nutrition they need, which translates to more than 1 in 5 children facing food insecurity.

The group also reported Oklahoma is one of five states with food insecurity rates above 14.5%. Their studies show students who go to school hungry have more behavioral and social problems in school, are at a higher risk of having lower math and reading scores, and have lower high school graduation rates.

Given these outcomes, politicians shouldn’t have been upset or surprised when Oklahoma’s State Report Card from the Oklahoma State Department of Education disclosed only 27% of students met or exceeded grade-level standards by scoring at or above the proficient level on the state test in math, reading and science.

What future do our children have to look forward to when such outcomes dim the lights of their bright minds?

Simply put, the biggest threat to our children and their future is hunger and food insecurity, which are caused by poverty. Our children need solutions such as the child tax credit and free lunch pilot programs to be implemented now.

Let this be a call to action for Oklahoma politicians to start implementing solutions that will keep hunger out of the classroom so our children can start to focus on learning and succeeding. Let’s show our children we care by ensuring their basic needs are met.

— Tiffany Tagbo, Oklahoma City
We must speak for those who are left out of policy discussion.
Restore the Child Tax Credit expansion

By Tiffany Tagbo

April 24, 2024

Columnist challenges lawmakers to live on the $6 a day that SNAP recipients do, or to come and spend just one night in a shelter. "Once they experience these hardships, they'll restore the expanded Child Tax Credit faster than they can say 'expand it,'" writes Tiffany Tagbo, with Raise Your Voice to End Poverty (RESULTS).

If there's one thing I could tell federal lawmakers, it would be to bring back the expanded, monthly, fully refundable Child Tax Credit.

Those monthly payments of up to $300 per child cut child poverty nearly in half in just a few months. And when the credit expired in late 2021, child poverty immediately shot back up. So we know it works.

Lawmakers are now considering a more modest expansion. It doesn't go far enough, but it could lift another 400,000 kids out of poverty — children like the ones I worked with.

I grew up walking the fine line of having something and nothing all at the same time. I've experienced tumultuous times as an adult, and I've worked with people experiencing poverty and homelessness. I can tell lawmakers firsthand no matter which side of the coin families end up on, legislation and programs such as the Child Tax Credit, SNAP, WIC and other safety net programs make a difference.

When I was growing up, my mother worked several minimum-wage jobs and relied on social programs to fill the gaps left by low wages. As a result, my siblings and I never had to sleep on the streets, go to school hungry or wear tattered clothing like many children do.

With that help, I went on to graduate from the University of Central Oklahoma with a bachelor’s degree. Eventually, I became a child welfare investigator at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services following up on claims of neglect and abuse.
While I saw some of both, many of these cases were simply the conditions of poverty. Many caseworkers had never experienced poverty and couldn’t make the distinction, but I could. Unfortunately, poverty landed many children in the child welfare system.

With decent pay and benefits, I was able to buy a house. But the work was soul-crushing and I eventually burned out.

You do everything right, and still — boom! You’re knocked right down. One day you are employed with a good salary and benefits, the next you are unemployed without the means to afford the basics, even with a college degree. Married, pregnant and unable to find decent work, I relied on SNAP and Medicaid to get by — barely.

My job changed, but the clients I work with haven’t.

Poverty puts them in impossible situations. They must choose between food or shelter, medical care or poor health, running water or electricity. It’s a vicious cycle of suffering.

Without a fixed address or help navigating the system, families can’t always access assistance programs that would help them.

If my clients had the expanded monthly Child Tax Credit, many could have afforded housing, clothing and food — and escaped the cruel cycle of poverty. In his recent budget proposal, President Biden called on Congress to restore the expanded, pandemic-era Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit that lifted tens of millions out of poverty in 2021.

A newer bipartisan tax proposal before the Senate would help. It would modestly expand the Child Tax Credit, lifting 400,000 kids out of poverty and helping 16 million overall.

The bill passed the House with an overwhelming bipartisan majority but has stalled in the Senate, where some senators are blocking it for political gain. Families deserve better. The time for delay is over. The Senate needs to vote.

I challenge lawmakers to live on the $6 a day that SNAP recipients do, or to come and spend just one night in a shelter. Once they experience these hardships, they’ll restore the expanded Child Tax Credit faster than they can say “expand it.” Perhaps this should be a requirement of the job.
We must make our voices heard and speak for those who are silenced and often left out of policy discussion. We must restore the Child Tax Credit expansion and ensure the thriving of all children.

_Tiffany Tagbo is a mother of two who lives in Oklahoma City. She's an expert on poverty with Raise Your Voice to End Poverty (RESULTS). This commentary was distributed by OtherWords.org. It is available for republishing._


_Reprinted in:_

**Oklahoma Voice**

Oregon media
What a great way to start the New Year

January 2, 2024

Thanks for sharing Froma Harrop's thoughtful questions about the focus on current affordable housing solutions (“What do we really mean by affordable housing?,” Dec. 26).

One Congressional initiative is a renter tax credit that would ensure people with low incomes wouldn't pay over 30% of their income for rent.

Renewing the expanded Child Tax Credit would go a long way toward making sure families can afford housing and food. These and other equity initiatives can go a long way toward keeping people housed.

We can remind our representatives in Congress to start with these solutions when they return this month. What a great way to start the New Year!

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Washington


Reprinted in:

https://democratherald.com/opinion/letters/letter-what-a-great-way-to-start-the-new-year/article_3442a010-a520-11ee-ade0-cf0c79f5d003.html
Bipartisan win

January 24, 2024

Exciting news: A bipartisan compromise on renewing the expanded Child Tax Credit, estimating this expansion will benefit 5 million children in families with low income, including lifting 500,000 children from poverty. Of course this proposed legislation still needs to pass the Senate and the House. Rep. Jason Smith (R-MO) and Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) have led negotiations on this bipartisan tax package. Those who represent us need to hear this package needs to pass now! A quick call, 202-224-3121, asking them to support this initiative will make a difference and millions will thank you.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Wash.

Pro-EW, Pro Child Tax Credit

February 1, 2024

Great to see Eugene Weekly still functioning online and the outpouring of love from readers.

And no wonder, the Weekly is always positive and covering what others might not. My favorite part is the letters, where opinions are expressed and sometimes debated. The scourges of poverty, hunger and homelessness, have made these pages, as has the expanded Child Tax Credit that cut child poverty nearly in half before Congress failed to renew it.

Right now Congress is considering a bipartisan tax bill that would lift 500,000 children out of poverty while renewing some business tax credit. This initiative is more likely to pass if our members of Congress hear from us. Make the call, 202-224-3121, and ask your representative to vote for this bipartisan legislation that will make a difference for children.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Washington

Voices can turn the tide to end hunger

February 13, 2024

Exciting news for 400,000 children who will be lifted out of poverty if the tax bill passed by the House passes the Senate.

This is the movement on expanding the Child Tax Credit that was called for by citizens across the country (“What a great way to start the New Year,” Willie Dickerson, Jan. 2 edition of this paper). Taking a minute to thank your representatives and encouraging your senators to help pass this bill will continue to make a difference (202-224-3121).

It matters to millions struggling with poverty in our country. Our voices can turn the tide to end hunger and homelessness.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Washington

https://gazettetimes.com/opinion/letters/letter-voices-can-turn-the-tide-to-end-hunger/article_46e6da0b-3821-52c3-ba89-56867d1cea80.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=user-share

Reprinted in:

https://democratherald.com/opinion/letters/letter-voices-can-turn-the-tide-to-end-hunger/article_1e7ba562-c792-11ee-9306-bf161e0a3cc9.html
Lift People Out of Poverty

March 14, 2024

My letter from a month ago called for Congress to pass the bipartisan tax bill that included an increase in the child tax credit (“Pro-EW, Pro Child Tax Credit,” 2/1). No doubt many of us called our representatives to tell them to pass this poverty battling initiative: the House overwhelmingly passed it with majorities of both parties voting for it. Now it is the Senate's turn. The number is the same, 202-224-3121, to call your senators to pass this critical legislation. Half a million children lifted out of poverty and 16 million people will be more likely to avoid hunger and homelessness.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Washington

Thanks for clarification

April 10, 2024

Thanks for the timely clarification on the letters policy with election season seemingly upon us once again (“Reviewing letters policy in light of election season” by Chelsea Marr, Columbia Gorge News, March 20). Reminding us all to be civil with each other and use this forum to express our thoughts and opinions is a good idea any time. I appreciate being able to write about poverty issues both at home and globally. Currently, for some reason the Senate is waiting to pass the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, that the House passed two months ago by a large bipartisan majority. This bill would lift a half million children out of poverty and help 16 million children be able to count on food on the table.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Wash.

https://www.columbiagorgenews.com/opinion/your-voice-april-10/article_69adf2ec-f753-11ee-a24d-37a3553ef16b.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=user-share
Participate in democracy

June 5, 2024

Thanks for the local details on where to honor those who gave their lives for our country this Memorial Day ("Memorial Day ceremonies honor fallen," compiled by Trisha Walker, Columbia Gorge News, May 21, 2024).

Another way to honor these heroes is to participate in our democracy by voting and beyond. We can let those we elect know that priorities should be making sure all children have their basic needs met. For example, this means a strong SNAP program, so all get enough to eat; passing the bipartisan Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act that would help 16 million children in low income families meet basic needs; and of course, affordable housing. In this way we can work to protect the values the ones who gave their lives fought for.

─ Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Wash.

https://www.columbiagorgenews.com/opinion/your-voice-june-5-2024/article_853c05e8-2279-11ef-b1ab-63875ce3e0b9.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=user-share
Protect SNAP in the new Farm Bill

June 8, 2024

Dear Editor:

Many of us take nutritious food for granted. We have three square meals a day, and we think nothing of picking something up to eat when hungry. Unfortunately, many people across the United States don't have this luxury. Many people are financially insecure, and with this, food security becomes an inevitable problem.

In Ohio, close to 11% of households were “food insecure” in 2020. Fortunately, the U.S. has strong programs to help support those in need get basic sustenance. One of the largest and most impactful is SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. In 2022, SNAP helped close to 1.5 million Ohioans. However, with the upcoming review of the Farm Bill, SNAP is in jeopardy, as some members of Congress are proposing cuts and restrictions.

SNAP should be strengthened, not weakened, and we need Congress to do what it can to help those most in need.

I call on Representative Joyce to speak with Representatives Thompson and Scott of the House Agriculture Committee and call on Senators Brown and Vance to speak with Senators Stabenow and Boozman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, to urge them to protect and strengthen SNAP in the new Farm Bill.

— Keith Task, Southington

Pennsylvania media
People who give hope when poverty rises

By Karen Dolan

January 1, 2024

It’s been a difficult few years for poor people in this country. Just a year after the pandemic era safety net expansion saw poverty fall to its lowest level on record, we saw a historic 60% increase as those programs expired.

Women and children have been among the hardest hit. In 2022, the last year we have data for, at least 32 million women and children were living in poverty.

Despite that hardship, I feel some hope.

Strong and resilient

That’s because I’ve spent the last few years working with poor and low-income people — mostly single moms — impacted by systemic poverty. Through helping them tell their stories, I’ve learned that they’re some of the strongest — and most resilient — members of our society.

Take Amy Adams from rural Kentucky. She has two associate degrees. Yet with a dearth of child care options, no public transit, and wages too low to afford even a second bedroom, her daily challenges are astounding. She walks to and from work late at night, depends on family for child care, and somehow fits her family of four into a small one-bedroom apartment.

Despite these challenges, Amy still gives her time as a member of a non-profit advocacy board to help other struggling mothers fight for policies that will improve their lives.

Or Joyce Kendrick. Joyce grew up in a middle-income family but suffered abuse as a child that led to lifelong physical and mental health challenges. The increase in food benefits and cash assistance during the pandemic briefly lifted her out of poverty. But when Congress failed to renew those critical supports, she fell right back in.
Yet even as she struggles to make ends meet, Joyce co-leads an Ohio chapter of the Poor People’s Campaign, a national coalition of poor and low-income people working together for more just policies.

**Poverty is a policy choice**

Growing up poor and escaping an abusive partner later in life, Trish Brown has benefited from safety net support not only to take care of her family, but also her community. She volunteers as a coordinating committee member of the Poor People’s Campaign in Florida and gives back as the founder and director of Power Up People in Tallahassee.

Wisconsin mom Kali Daugherty’s family was transformed by the expanded Child Tax Credit included in the American Rescue Plan, which cut child poverty by half nationally. With that help, she was able to return to school, get her child new clothes, and take her to a water park for the first time.

Kazmyn Ramos learned through generational poverty how key housing is to well-being. Believing that “housing should be seen as a human right and a community builder, not a wealth builder,” she founded the affordable housing non-profit Seeking 1610.

My organization, the Institute for Policy Studies, partnered with the Poor People’s Campaign to study the increase in suffering since the expiration of the pandemic era supports that helped these women keep their families’ heads above water.

Alongside increases in poverty, we found increases in food and housing insecurity, the loss of critical health care, and declines in life expectancy — even as billionaire wealth nationally grew by $2 billion a day between 2020 and 2022. It’s clearer than ever that poverty is a policy choice.

**Different choices**

But that means we can choose differently. Amy, Joyce, Trish, Kali, and Kazmyn are just a few of the millions of poor and low-income women leading the way against these systemic policy failures that impact all of us. We need to join them and demand our nation make the investments to end structural poverty.
We know what works. Collectively, we have a voice powerful enough to make it happen.

*Karen Dolan directs the Criminalization of Race and Poverty Project at the Institute for Policy Studies.*
Child Tax Credit should be renewed

January 19, 2024

It seems obvious that no child in America should go hungry and the new summer EBT Program reaching 21 million children is a good start to that goal. ("USDA says 21 million kids will receive summer food benefits" by Kenya Hunter, Altoona Mirror, Jan. 11, 2024).

At the same time, why not renew the expanded Child Tax Credit that cut child poverty nearly in half. That would be another great step toward ending child hunger in the world's richest nation.

With Congress currently working on a tax bill, if we ask our representatives to take this action, that could include this ladder out of poverty.

With child hunger and despair rising, we can't afford not to take this action.

Remember our country's future depends on the children.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Wash.

https://www.altoonamirror.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/2024/01/child-tax-credit-should-be-renewed/
WIC changes children's lives, but not every life it could change

By Candace Baker

February 5, 2024

When my grandmother was raising my cousins and me, she taught us to work hard and go after what we wanted. I didn't know it at the time, but we were in poverty.

Scared of judgment and bureaucracy, my grandmother refused to apply for assistance programs. But that meant she had to work several jobs, day and night, bringing us with her because she couldn't afford child care. We barely got by — and enjoyed no time together outside of work and school.

That's life?

We thought that's how everyone lived. Your grandma works around the clock and still can't make ends meet. That's life, right? But as I got older, I saw that other kids had new clothes, after-school activities, and time to play.

I wanted that. And most of all, I wanted to help my grandmother so that she could have it too. So I vowed to get a college education and a good-paying job helping others.

If I wanted to achieve my dream of helping my family, I knew I'd have to do something different. I'd heard about a program that helped pregnant and postpartum moms and their babies, the Special Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children, also known as WIC.

I almost didn't apply because when I tried to enroll in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), I ran into the same judgment and bureaucratic stumbling blocks my grandmother feared. But I knew I needed help — and so did my baby.

And let me tell you — WIC was a game-changer. And families like mine are everywhere — about half of all babies born in the United States benefit from WIC.

WIC not only provides nutritious foods but also nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and even health care referrals for low-income mothers and small children. It
helps to reduce maternal and infant mortality and improves health outcomes so children have the best chance at a healthy and productive life.

**Just a little help**

I also was able to get the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help with our food needs. And because of these programs, I was able to go back to school, get my high school diploma, enroll in college, and graduate Magna Cum Laude.

I was even able to become a volunteer mentor with a federally funded program called Second Chance to help people who served prison time reenter society in a healthy, productive way.

It turns out that most of us just need a little help at especially difficult times in our lives. If wages had kept pace with the rising cost of living, rent, and food, perhaps we wouldn't need assistance programs. But wages haven't kept pace with living costs in 50 years.

For the past 25 years, WIC has served every eligible family that applied for its critical services. But now it's in danger — Congress hasn't agreed to fund the program to meet the needs of all who are eligible. There's a $1 billion shortfall, which means that 2 million pregnant and postpartum women and their little ones won't get necessary food and health assistance.

Imagine all those families that will face food insecurity, childbirth complications, and negative impacts on their health and well-being that can last a lifetime — even generations.

**Fund the program**

I now have four children. All four benefited greatly from the WIC program, just as all who are eligible deserve to do. I believe in everything WIC does — I even took a job there helping with breastfeeding support.

I'm also an Expert on Poverty at the anti-poverty organization RESULTS. These opportunities allow me to advocate for the programs that supported me when I was in need.
Congress must do the same. It must fully fund the WIC program so that no eligible family is turned away.

*Candace Baker is a mother and expert on poverty at RESULTS from Indianapolis, Indiana.*

https://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/Op-Ed/2024/02/05/wic-funding-poverty-pregnant-newborns-nutrition/stories/202402050007

**Reprinted in:**

Having a baby in America should be easier

By Lindsay K. Saunders

February 15, 2023

I had a baby in 2021 and quickly learned how parenting and child care expenses add up. My husband and I had saved up for months to afford my unpaid maternity leave — I kept working even after my water broke because we needed every penny. It was a dream come true to have a career that I was proud of and finally be welcoming a child into our lives.

But I had no idea how hard it would really be.

**Stress and trauma**

While I was on unpaid maternity leave that cost us our health benefits, my husband was let go from his job. Already reliant on WIC — the federal food aid program for women, infants, and children — we were forced to go to food pantries, apply for Medicaid, and referred to a diaper bank. We were in survival mode: exhausted, stressed out, and worried.

Despite a litany of postpartum complications that continue to plague me more than two years later, I ended up only taking seven weeks of leave before I returned to work out of desperation.

Instead, my first and only experience with motherhood was marred by stress and trauma. Again and again, I had to choose between my health and a paycheck, which can feel like a punishment. I'd proudly served my country on a one-year assignment overseas working on foreign aid, and it didn't matter.

We found child care at a loving, quality child care center, but the tuition kept increasing. Now the monthly cost is almost twice our mortgage. In fact, child care costs exceed college tuition where we live in North Carolina, as well as in at least 27 other states. My stomach gets in a knot every six months when I know the tuition will increase again.
I wondered: Why don’t we invest more in early care and education?  

**And crises**  

Meanwhile, the crises causing outsized harm to families throughout the pandemic compounded: a diaper shortage, a formula shortage, inflation, and wages that wouldn’t keep up. So many people are struggling to get back on their feet and desperately need balance and some peace of mind.

I have an advanced degree and work as a communications director at a nonprofit while also freelancing. After paying for necessities, we have nothing left, so I get food and supplies from neighbors and friends.

I work so hard to try to achieve the dreams I have for myself and my baby boy — the dreams that all mothers have. I don’t want my child to deal with the stress and constant refrain of “we don’t have the money for that,” like I did growing up.

Families desperately need, want, and deserve better. Welcoming a child should never be the reason a family plunges into poverty, especially in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We shouldn’t be sacrificing health, quality early learning, or stability in exchange for a roof over our heads and food. Instead, we should be building strong foundations and generational wealth for our kids.

**What families need**  

We need federally mandated paid parental and medical leave. We need additional dedicated funding for programs like WIC that support over 6 million families.

And we need to continue expanding the Child Tax Credit. In North Carolina alone, the monthly Child Tax Credits received in 2021 helped the families of 140,000 children lift themselves out of poverty. Nationally, the credit cut child poverty by over 40% before Congress let the pandemic expansion expire at the end of 2021.

Congress must put our tax dollars and policies toward strong support for families. Let’s ensure no parent experiences welcoming a child as a financial catastrophe and make this country a place where families prosper.

*Lindsay K. Saunders is a North Carolina mother and advocate for RESULTS Educational Fund.*
Lawmakers Should Spend a Night in a Homeless Shelter

Maybe then they'd drop their opposition to even modest tax credits for low-income people like the ones I work with.

by Tiffany Tagbo

April 25, 2024

If there's one thing I could tell lawmakers, it would be to bring back the expanded, monthly, fully refundable Child Tax Credit.

Those monthly payments of up to $300 per child cut child poverty nearly in half in just a few months. And when the credit expired in late 2021, child poverty immediately shot back up. So we know it works.

Lawmakers are now considering a more modest expansion. It doesn't go far enough, but it could lift another 400,000 kids out of poverty — children like the ones I worked with.

I grew up walking the fine line of having something and nothing all at the same time. I've experienced tumultuous times as an adult, and I've worked with people experiencing poverty and homelessness. I can tell lawmakers firsthand no matter which side of the coin families end up on, legislation and programs such as the Child Tax Credit, SNAP, WIC, and other safety net programs make a difference.

When I was growing up, my mother worked several minimum-wage jobs and relied on social programs to fill the gaps left by low wages. As a result, my siblings and I never had to sleep on the streets, go to school hungry, or wear tattered clothing like many children do.

With that help, I went on to graduate from the University of Central Oklahoma with a bachelor’s degree. Eventually, I became a Child Welfare Investigator at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services following up on claims of neglect and abuse.
While I saw some of both, many of these cases were simply the conditions of poverty. Many caseworkers had never experienced poverty and couldn’t make the distinction, but I could. Unfortunately, poverty landed many children in the child welfare system.

With decent pay and benefits, I was able to buy a house. But the work was soul-crushing and I eventually burned out.

You do everything right, and still — boom! You’re knocked right down. One day you are employed with a good salary and benefits, the next you are unemployed without the means to afford the basics, even with a college degree. Married, pregnant, and unable to find decent work, I relied on SNAP and Medicaid to get by — barely.

My job changed, but the clients I work with haven’t.

Poverty puts them in impossible situations. They must choose between food or shelter, medical care or poor health, running water or electricity. It’s a vicious cycle of suffering.

Without a fixed address or help navigating the system, families can’t always access assistance programs that would help them.

If my clients had the expanded monthly Child Tax Credit, many could have afforded housing, clothing, and food — and escaped the cruel cycle of poverty. In his recent budget proposal, President Biden called on Congress to restore the expanded, pandemic-era Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit that lifted tens of millions out of poverty in 2021.

A newer bipartisan tax proposal before the Senate would help. It would modestly expand the Child Tax Credit, lifting 400,000 kids out of poverty and helping 16 million overall.

The bill passed the House with an overwhelming bipartisan majority but has stalled in the Senate, where some senators are blocking it for political gain. Families deserve better. The time for delay is over. The Senate needs to vote.

I challenge lawmakers to live on the $6 a day that SNAP recipients do, or to come and spend just one night in a shelter. Once they experience these hardships, they’ll restore the expanded Child Tax Credit faster than they can say “expand it.” Perhaps this should be a requirement of the job.
We must make our voices heard and speak for those who are silenced and often left out of policy discussion. We must restore the Child Tax Credit expansion and ensure the thriving of all children.

This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

*Tiffany Tagbo is a mother of two from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and an Expert on Poverty with RESULTS.*

https://buckscountybeacon.com/2024/04/lawmakers-should-spend-a-night-in-a-homeless-shelter/

*Reprinted in:*

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

https://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/2024/05/02/tagbo-child-tax-credit-poverty-welfare/stories/202405020070
I Run a Food Pantry But It’s Not Enough. We Need Funding for SNAP

I’m proud to help my neighbors. But food donations are no substitute for government nutrition programs like SNAP, which is now under threat.

By Carla Ventura

May 14, 2024

I run a food pantry. I’m proud of the work we do. But if lawmakers passed a liveable minimum wage or invested more in programs like SNAP, people wouldn’t need to rely on pantries like mine.

Pantries are a critical piece of the anti-hunger puzzle, but they’re filler pieces. Government nutrition programs — with the infrastructure and funding to get the job done — should be the centerpiece.

I grew up on food stamps, called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. My mother worked hard, but her wages were too low to meet our basic needs. Sometimes we felt embarrassed pulling out the stamps at the register — I worried kids would talk about me at school.

But the aid was a blessing. It helped keep us from hunger. Even still, food stamps weren’t designed to last the whole month. Most months, we had to travel long distances — often outside our county — to find food pantries so we could get by.

SNAP is the nation’s most effective anti-hunger program, feeding nearly a quarter of all U.S. children. The program reduces hunger by about 30 percent, improves long-term educational, health, and economic outcomes for children, and helps address systemic racial disparities in poverty.

SNAP is the first line of defense in a down economy. In fact, food insecurity fell to a record low of 10.2 percent in 2021 — in the middle of the pandemic — due to the
pandemic-era boost in SNAP benefits. But now that those benefits have expired, nearly 13 percent of us experience food insecurity.

For many Americans, wages are simply too low. To meet basic needs in South Carolina, where I live, two adults with two children must earn over $21 per hour. But our state minimum wage is just $7.25.

A person would have to work 106 hours a week at that wage to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment here. Actually, the minimum wage isn't enough to cover the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the country.

Over 44 million Americans rely on SNAP to combat hunger. Yet some members of Congress are proposing cutting the program by a whopping $30 billion over the coming decade. South Carolina alone, which is among the top 10 states with the greatest food insecurity, would suffer $400 million in cuts.

That would be devastating for families like mine.

I'm a single mother with three kids. At age three, one of my sons was diagnosed with autism, and I couldn’t find affordable daycare that could accommodate his needs. Every week, I had to leave work at a moment’s notice to help him or rush him home. I couldn’t sustain employment. I needed help during that challenging time, and SNAP provided it.

I now run a food pantry, Food for All, where I've seen that I'm far from alone.

I listen to the stories of people who come here and share my own to ease their feelings of embarrassment. I breathe a sigh of relief with them when they tell me, “Now I can afford my medication,” “Now I can make rent,” or “Now I don’t have to choose between feeding my child and getting her new shoes.”

But other times, I have to watch those who've waited in long lines for an hour be turned away because the food has run out. I can't possibly get enough food donations to meet the enormous need.

But I won't give up. None of us can.
That's why I continue to fight for robust funding — and against the proposed slashing — of SNAP. People shouldn't have to rely on food pantries to feed themselves or their families.

We know what works. We saw how hunger decreased during the pandemic when it had been forecast to skyrocket because we invested in the well-being of families. We must do that again.

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Carla Ventura is a mother, founder of the nonprofit Food for All, and an Expert on Poverty with RESULTS from Columbia, South Carolina.

https://buckscountybeacon.com/2024/05/i-run-a-food-pantry-but-its-not-enough-we-need-funding-for-snap/
South Carolina media
Fully Fund SNAP

March 10, 2024

Congress is attempting to undermine choice in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to fund the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

The recent proposal to hold the WIC funding hostage to pilot a program to limit the food choices of SNAP recipients is unjust and fundamentally undermines freedom for adults to make decisions for themselves.

Food insecurity is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive solution. SNAP and WIC play crucial roles in ensuring that low-income families have access to nutritious foods, yet Congress seems intent on eroding these vital programs with political posturing and holding programs captive to further their narrow minded, uninformed agenda.

By attempting to dictate what foods SNAP recipients can purchase, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle are infringing on individual autonomy and failing to address the root causes of food insecurity and poor nutrition by failing to address the systemic issues we face.

The lack of adequate funding for SNAP and WIC exacerbates the problem making it difficult for recipients to afford healthy foods and formulas.

This neglect perpetuates a cycle of poverty and poor health that disproportionately affects the most vulnerable.

These efforts work to impose punitive measures that will further marginalize members of our community.

Congressmen and women from North and South Carolina must prioritize the well-being of all Carolinians by fully funding SNAP, attacking the root causes for food
insecurity and supporting programs like WIC that provide vital nutrition assistance to women, infants, and children.

— Yolanda M. Gordon, Fort Mill

https://www.thestate.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/article286443065.html
Senators blocking tax cut for families for political gain

March 27, 2024

How long must families wait? It's been nearly two months since the House has passed a bipartisan expansion of the Child Tax Credit and sent it to the Senate. Estimates are that this bill will benefit 16 million children in families with low incomes, including 5.8 million kids under the age of six.

You would think that in an election year, Congress would be eager to pass a tax cut for families (and small businesses). But a few senators are blocking it for political gain. Families should not have to wait months for Congress to pass something that is both popular and necessary.

It is time for senators to show us their hands. If the bill passes, families win. If it fails, senators can explain to voters why they chose to keep children in poverty.

When the Senate returns to Washington after Easter, I urge our senators to demand an immediate vote and then vote YES on the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act.

— Kathy Bradley, Lugoff

https://www.theitem.com/stories/senators-blocking-tax-cut-for-families-for-political-gain,413500?
Tennessee media
Urge Congress to expand child tax credit, support child nutrition in the Farm Bill

May 22, 2024

To the Editor:

The April 30 article “Tennessee legislature ends: What lawmakers did and didn’t do in 2024,” lists several bills passed and opportunities lost. It states that while legislation “includes $1.9 billion in franchise tax breaks for businesses, it does not include funding for a [traditional monthlong] grocery tax holiday for Tennessee families” nor does it “make meals at public schools free for all children.”

What can the United States Congress do to make policies more equitable? The Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act would expand the Child Tax Credit allowing low-income families to get the full $2,000 credit for all their children. It is estimated 385,000 Tennessee children would benefit. Families could pay for rent, food, school supplies and more.

Also, Congress’ five-year reauthorization of the Farm Bill should ensure that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is not cut. Removing harmful work requirements would expand critical nutrition benefits to older Americans, formerly incarcerated people, and many low-income Americans.

Let’s urge Congress to support SNAP in the Farm Bill and tell our senators to stop stalling and pass the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act now. These policies will positively impact fellow Tennesseans most in need.

— Anne Child, Oak Ridge

https://www.oakridger.com/story/opinion/letters/2024/05/22/letter-support-tax-credit-child-nutrition-in-the-farm-bill/73673566007/
Texas media
A billionaire gambler gave Abbott $6 million. It's time for Texans to reclaim their democracy.

By Claudia Morgan and Sam Daley-Harris

January 19, 2024

A Pennsylvania billionaire gave Gov. Greg Abbott $6 million last month in the single largest donation in Texas political history, money the governor promises to employ in his reprisals against reasonable Republicans.

Texans must take their government back from the oligarchs who are showering our leaders with millions, and there’s a manual on how to do it.

Abbott’s new donor is Jeff Yass, a former professional gambler and co-founder of Susquehanna International Group, an investment firm specializing in options trading, another form of gambling. He is the 52nd wealthiest man in the world, worth $28.9 billion, according to Forbes, and he's obsessed with destroying public schools.

Abbott could not be prouder.

“With this substantial financial backing, Governor Abbott will ensure that the conservative candidates who support his bold agenda to expand school choice, secure our southern border, and lower property taxes have what they need to keep Texas red,” a campaign statement declared.

Yass is the Tim Dunn of Pennsylvania, a reclusive libertarian billionaire who uses loose campaign finance laws and secretive political action committees to drive his ideological agenda. Like Dunn, who recently pocketed billions more by selling his West Texas oil and gas company, he’s not afraid to back the most extreme right wing characters.

Yass handed out $18 million to his favored candidates in Pennsylvania’s 2022 primary elections and is a heavy donor to the ultraconservative State Policy Network. The local chapter is the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a right wing group that strikes fear in every Republican politician.
Investigative journalism outfit ProPublica took a deep dive into how Yass has avoided paying $1 billion in taxes. Meanwhile, he called the COVID-19 pandemic a boon for his bottom line and invests in gambling websites that exploit addiction.

Abbott, who is not up for reelection this year, will spend some of the money to defeat rural Republicans who voted against his plan to provide taxpayer-funded private school vouchers and gut public school funding. Rural lawmakers recognize that public schools are the largest employers in their districts, which do not have private schools.

Yass' gift doubles Dunn's $3 million contribution to Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick's campaign coffers through his Defend Texas Liberty PAC. Just as Patrick delivered an acquittal for Dunn's handpicked attorney general, Ken Paxton, Yass hopes Abbott can deliver on school vouchers despite polls showing most Texans oppose them.

Such massive donations, extremist rhetoric and one-party rule have left most Texas voters disillusioned. A new Pew Research survey shows extreme partisanship is souring all Americans on our democracy.

“I feel like if I could get my voice out there more, I would be more involved,” one Republican-leaning woman told Pew. “I'm not one of the important people, you know what I mean?”

Sam Daley-Harris knows precisely how she feels, which is why he's thoroughly updated his book, “Reclaiming Our Democracy.” The book provides a detailed guide to nonpartisan engagement with politicians of every stripe to demand they meet the needs of the people, not their billionaire donors.

Daley-Harris’ experience founding RESULTS, an anti-poverty nonprofit, in 1985 informs his tactics. The group trains volunteers to contact their elected officials, get appointments with them or their staff and make the case for common sense solutions.

RESULTS is good at alerting the media, too. Readers should know the Houston chapter gave me an award last year for my commentary on poverty and health issues.

Citizens are shocked to learn how responsive elected officials can be, especially if you offer an intelligent pitch instead of cursing at them. Politicians and journalists are swamped with emails and messages from professional communicators daily, and we don't hear enough from regular folks who sincerely desire to better their community.
“The book aims to show people that when it comes to protecting our democracy, more is possible than just voting, as important as that is, or standing by and watching in horror,” Daley-Harris told me.

I sense that every person who tells me they hate politics and politicians is hungry for change. We can see it in the polls showing how much we disapprove of our leaders. We live it through low-turnout elections. Only 16% of Houston voters cast ballots in the mayoral runoff.

This year, we need angry and disillusioned citizens to speak up because, I promise you, that’s what the extremists and billionaires on all sides fear the most. A popular revolt by the center would take away their partisan power and replace it with the practically-minded democracy we all want.

https://link.houstonchronicle.com/view/5d2a1d76fc942d07dc18969ek9v2r.zp/30c8d7ba
Listen to Results

February 2, 2024

Texans must recognize their power as voters. Congress is accountable to us, the taxpayers, so we should advocate for change. Antipathy and apathy threaten our democracy, but we can overcome them.

Nonpartisan organizations like Results provide a platform for individuals to use their voices to influence political decisions. Results has local chapters in Dallas and Fort Worth, offering opportunities to engage and make a difference.

I encourage readers to join organizations like Results, research candidates and demand honesty and humility from our elected officials. Let’s reclaim our democracy and shape the future of our great state Texas and the country.

— Bukekile Dube, McKinney

Be a voter and an advocate

February 4, 2024

Re: “How We Can Reclaim Our Democracy — We have to be more discerning voters. Our Voter Guide can help you make a decision,” Wednesday editorial.

Apollo Astronaut Rusty Schweickart said: “We aren’t passengers on Spaceship Earth, we’re the crew. We aren’t residents on this planet, we’re citizens. The difference in both cases is responsibility.”

This editorial about voting and being informed is hugely important. But what about all the time between elections the days, weeks, and months afterward?

I recently read Sam Daley-Harris’ book, Reclaiming Our Democracy, and listened to Kris Boyd’s Think interview of Daley-Harris, “Why signing that online petition isn’t enough.” Daley-Harris founded the anti-poverty lobby Results in 1980 and Civic Courage in 2012.

Almost 15 years ago, a group of very ordinary Dallas folks joined Results and learned how to advocate effectively with our elected officials. Since then we have had members of Congress take 217 actions by meeting with them or their staff 252 times, generating 174 pieces of published media and holding 76 community events. It has been a transformational experience and not something I ever thought I could do.

So in addition to becoming a discerning voter, why not become an advocate? It would be a powerful way to make a difference while strengthening our democracy in the process.

— Margaret Smith, Dallas/Turtle Creek

Back expanded child tax credit

March 17, 2024

Re: “Child tax credit debate is just the beginning,” Monday news story.

This story concerning the child tax credit debate explains the upcoming opportunities that Congress has to greatly reduce childhood poverty in our country. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress approved a temporary child tax credit which lifted about 16 million children out of poverty.

The use of these funds was closely monitored, and it was found that they were used for the purposes intended. However, it then lapsed. At present an expansion of the child tax credit has been passed by the House, and it awaits passage in the Senate, but to this point no vote has been taken, and our Texas senators have not indicated how they plan to vote.

A false objection has been raised concerning the need to approve it before the federal tax deadline, but as this story points out, the Treasury Department can automatically amend returns for those who are eligible and apply the child tax credit.

The affected children of this country did not choose to be in a state of poverty, and it is only with this child tax credit that millions of them can be lifted out of it. Urge Sens. John Cornyn and Ted Cruz to vote in favor of the expanded child tax credit.

— Martin G. White, Dallas/Turtle Creek

Promote expanded child tax credit

March 20, 2024

The recent voter turnout in our recent Texas primaries is disheartening. I think most of us often overlook the power of our collective voice, especially in shaping policies that directly impact our lives like the child tax credit.

During the pandemic, a temporary child tax credit boost helped millions, demonstrating its effectiveness. Now, with the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, we have a chance to make that impact lasting. This bill could significantly reduce childhood poverty across the nation, but it is currently stalled in the Senate. Yet, our senators remain silent and haven't shown where they stand.

Like the primaries, its fate hinges on our engagement and willingness to speak up. Our low primary turnout should challenge and motivate us to be better. We have an opportunity to demonstrate that Texans do care deeply about their communities and the legacy we leave for our children.

I urge you all to not only become a more active voter but to also become an advocate. Please contact Sens. John Cornyn and Ted Cruz of Texas to vote in favor of the expanded child tax credit. Democracy matters, and I know that together, we can make a difference!

— Siddarth Vyas, Dallas

Long-term changes

April 7, 2024

Regarding “How IRS Direct File could save you time and money | Opinion,” (April 3): Interesting, very interesting to read in Shannon Halbrook’s op-ed about the benefits Texas taxpayers could take advantage of if they use the free IRS Direct File pilot program. The hope is that the program will expand in coming years so that (in part) many more low-income families who do not file income tax but who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit will use the program.

My hope is that Congress will move on the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act. And more specifically, I hope the Senate Finance Committee, where the bill appears stalled, will expand the Child Tax Credit for the next three years. Texas Senior Sen. John Cornyn sits on this committee and can be reached at 202-224-2934.

— Kathleen Duncan, La Porte, RESULTS volunteer

Lawmakers should spend a night in a homeless shelter

By Tiffany Tagbo

April 23, 2024

If there’s one thing I could tell lawmakers, it would be to bring back the expanded, monthly, fully refundable Child Tax Credit.

Those monthly payments of up to $300 per child cut child poverty nearly in half in just a few months. And when the credit expired in late 2021, child poverty immediately shot back up. So we know it works.

Lawmakers are now considering a more modest expansion. It doesn’t go far enough, but it could lift another 400,000 kids out of poverty — children like the ones I worked with.

I grew up walking the fine line of having something and nothing all at the same time. I’ve experienced tumultuous times as an adult, and I’ve worked with people experiencing poverty and homelessness. I can tell lawmakers firsthand no matter which side of the coin families end up on, legislation and programs such as the Child Tax Credit, SNAP, WIC, and other safety net programs make a difference.

When I was growing up, my mother worked several minimum-wage jobs and relied on social programs to fill the gaps left by low wages. As a result, my siblings and I never had to sleep on the streets, go to school hungry, or wear tattered clothing like many children do.

With that help, I went on to graduate from the University of Central Oklahoma with a bachelor’s degree. Eventually, I became a Child Welfare Investigator at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services following up on claims of neglect and abuse.

While I saw some of both, many of these cases were simply the conditions of poverty. Many caseworkers had never experienced poverty and couldn’t make the distinction, but I could. Unfortunately, poverty landed many children in the child welfare system.
With decent pay and benefits, I was able to buy a house. But the work was soul-crushing and I eventually burned out.

You do everything right, and still — boom! You’re knocked right down. One day you are employed with a good salary and benefits, the next you are unemployed without the means to afford the basics, even with a college degree. Married, pregnant, and unable to find decent work, I relied on SNAP and Medicaid to get by — barely.

My job changed, but the clients I work with haven’t.

Poverty puts them in impossible situations. They must choose between food or shelter, medical care or poor health, running water or electricity. It’s a vicious cycle of suffering.

Without a fixed address or help navigating the system, families can’t always access assistance programs that would help them.

If my clients had the expanded monthly Child Tax Credit, many could have afforded housing, clothing, and food — and escaped the cruel cycle of poverty. In his recent budget proposal, President Biden called on Congress to restore the expanded, pandemic-era Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit that lifted tens of millions out of poverty in 2021.

A newer bipartisan tax proposal before the Senate would help. It would modestly expand the Child Tax Credit, lifting 400,000 kids out of poverty and helping 16 million overall.

The bill passed the House with an overwhelming bipartisan majority but has stalled in the Senate, where some senators are blocking it for political gain. Families deserve better. The time for delay is over. The Senate needs to vote.

I challenge lawmakers to live on the $6 a day that SNAP recipients do, or to come and spend just one night in a shelter. Once they experience these hardships, they’ll restore the expanded Child Tax Credit faster than they can say “expand it.” Perhaps this should be a requirement of the job.

We must make our voices heard and speak for those who are silenced and often left out of policy discussion. We must restore the Child Tax Credit expansion and ensure the thriving of all children.
— Tiffany Tagbo is a mother of two from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and an Expert on Poverty with RESULTS. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

https://tylerpaper.com/opinion/columnists/tagbo-lawmakers-should-spend-a-night-in-a-homeless-shelter/article_f2a2ac48-0197-11ef-b360-8f66a43ff395.html
I run a food pantry but it's not enough. We need funding for SNAP.

By Carla Ventura

May 9, 2024

I run a food pantry. I’m proud of the work we do. But if lawmakers passed a livable minimum wage or invested more in programs like SNAP, people wouldn’t need to rely on pantries like mine.

Pantries are a critical piece of the anti-hunger puzzle, but they’re filler pieces. Government nutrition programs — with the infrastructure and funding to get the job done — should be the centerpiece.

I grew up on food stamps, called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. My mother worked hard, but her wages were too low to meet our basic needs. Sometimes we felt embarrassed pulling out the stamps at the register — I worried kids would talk about me at school.

But the aid was a blessing. It helped keep us from hunger. Even still, food stamps weren’t designed to last the whole month. Most months, we had to travel long distances — often outside our county — to find food pantries so we could get by.

SNAP is the nation’s most effective anti-hunger program, feeding nearly a quarter of all U.S. children. The program reduces hunger by about 30 percent, improves long-term educational, health, and economic outcomes for children, and helps address systemic racial disparities in poverty.

SNAP is the first line of defense in a down economy. In fact, food insecurity fell to a record low of 10.2 percent in 2021 — in the middle of the pandemic — due to the pandemic-era boost in SNAP benefits. But now that those benefits have expired, nearly 13 percent of us experience food insecurity.
For many Americans, wages are simply too low. To meet basic needs in South Carolina, where I live, two adults with two children must earn over $21 per hour. But our state minimum wage is just $7.25.

A person would have to work 106 hours a week at that wage to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment here. Actually, the minimum wage isn't enough to cover the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the country.

Over 44 million Americans rely on SNAP to combat hunger. Yet some members of Congress are proposing cutting the program by a whopping $30 billion over the coming decade. South Carolina alone, which is among the top 10 states with the greatest food insecurity, would suffer $400 million in cuts.

That would be devastating for families like mine.

I'm a single mother with three kids. At age three, one of my sons was diagnosed with autism, and I couldn't find affordable daycare that could accommodate his needs. Every week, I had to leave work at a moment's notice to help him or rush him home. I couldn’t sustain employment. I needed help during that challenging time, and SNAP provided it.

I now run a food pantry, Food for All, where I’ve seen that I’m far from alone.

I listen to the stories of people who come here and share my own to ease their feelings of embarrassment. I breathe a sigh of relief with them when they tell me, “Now I can afford my medication,” “Now I can make rent,” or “Now I don't have to choose between feeding my child and getting her new shoes.”

But other times, I have to watch those who’ve waited in long lines for an hour be turned away because the food has run out. I can't possibly get enough food donations to meet the enormous need.

But I won’t give up. None of us can.

That's why I continue to fight for robust funding — and against the proposed slashing — of SNAP. People shouldn't have to rely on food pantries to feed themselves or their families.
We know what works. We saw how hunger decreased during the pandemic when it had been forecast to skyrocket because we invested in the well-being of families. We must do that again.

— Carla Ventura is a mother, founder of the nonprofit Food for All, and an Expert on Poverty with RESULTS from Columbia, South Carolina. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

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I Run a Food Pantry But It’s Not Enough. We Need Funding for SNAP.

*I’m proud to help my neighbors. But food donations are no substitute for government nutrition programs like SNAP, which is now under threat."

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June 8, 2024

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Carla Ventura is a mother, founder of the nonprofit Food for All, and an Expert on Poverty with RESULTS from Columbia, South Carolina. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

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Utah media
Child tax credit actually saves money. Romney and Lee should support the bill that expands it.

February 25, 2024

I am surprised to hear that Sen. Mitt Romney is unsure about supporting a tax bill that will strengthen Utah's families and economy. Especially since our entire U.S. House delegation did. So thanks go out to Reps. John Curtis, Blake Moore, Burgess Owens and Celeste Maloy.

The bill currently under consideration in the Senate includes tax breaks for business research and development and also expands the child tax credit (CTC), such that, for instance, the credit will be provided on a per-child basis, helping to stabilize our young families.

Sen. Romney specifically cited CTC costs as his concern. But the CTC actually saves money. Here's why:

When little kids don't get enough nutrition, their brains can be damaged, hampering their ability to learn throughout life. This harms the child's ability to fulfill their potential, while the rest of us miss out on their unrealized contributions as well. Instead, these kids are more likely to drop out of school and turn to crime. And that costs all of us a lot of money in the form of lost goods, plus greater expenses for police, courts and prisons. It's cheaper to just feed kids in the first place. It's more humane to make sure that little children have adequate nutrition, too.

So I urge Sen. Mitt Romney and Sen. Mike Lee to vote “Yes” on this important economy-boosting and family-stabilizing tax bill when it comes before the Senate.

— Georgia Platts, South Jordan

https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/letters/2024/02/25/letter-child-tax-credit-actually/
Washington state media
Cutting child poverty would help fulfill the dream

January 23, 2024

To the editor — Kudos to the Herald-Republic's thoughtful Jan. 14 editorial on Dr. King's dream and our part in helping it come true ("This weekend, remember you can't kill a dream").

Going beyond gestures to elect representatives and leaders who will work to put America on the road to equity is an important step. Battling the scourges of poverty including hunger, homelessness and lack of decent health care is important. The current bipartisan tax bill in Congress would begin to expand the child tax credit that originally cut child poverty nearly in half, would be a good start.

Those who represent us in Congress need to hear from us that this initiative needs to pass. A call or email would take a few minutes and make a difference. We need to take action to make Dr. King's dream come true.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish

Kudos to Congress for looking out for kids

February 4, 2024

So good of the Kitsap Sun to publish the story “How much is the child tax credit for 2023? Here’s what you need to know about qualifying.”

This tax tool has lifted as much as half of American children out of poverty during the COVID pandemic. Refreshingly, the U.S. House of Representatives passed bi-partisan legislation that will fund this supportive credit through 2025.

It expands the Child Tax Credit so that eligible families with low income will receive the same full CTC that wealthy families already get. Estimates are that the CTC changes will benefit 16 million children and lift 400,000 children from poverty in the first year alone.

How hopeful it is to see Democrats and Republicans start a contentious election year by coming together to help kids. It is true that this expansion is only a fraction of the 2021 CTC expansion that cut child poverty by 40 percent. And giving the CTC to all low-income children must remain our goal. But in a contentious, divided Congress, this is meaningful progress.

We must not waste this valuable opportunity to reduce child poverty. Kudos to our Senators Cantwell, Murray and Rep. Kilmer for their support for this Child Tax Credit expansion. Readers who have residency in states other than Washington should call their Senators hone the United States Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 to request their support of this important and effective tax bill.

— Diana Tyree-Eddy, Hansville

No online link
Yes, your vote — and your voice — matters

March 6, 2024

To the editor — Sandra Holden Montag is right to say “your vote matters.” (‘If you want to preserve your choices, vote,’ by Sandra Holden Montag, Yakima Herald-Republic, Feb. 1.) So does your voice. Right now you can ask Sens. Murray and Cantwell to push the current tax bill expanding the child tax credit. Not a hard sell since they both support it. But the more folks they hear from, the more evidence they have to convince their colleagues.

It matters to the 500,000 children who will be lifted out of poverty. It matters to the 16 million Americans who will make use of this ladder out of poverty.

Votes and voices, the best way to make a difference.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish

Congress should act on housing

March 15, 2024

Thanks for putting a face on the housing struggle millions of Americans face today ("Housed, but hanging on by thread," The Columbian, March 2). Monica Zazueta’s battle to stay housed is a reminder of the need for Congress to take action.

Recently the House did pass the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act with an overwhelming bipartisan vote that included an increase to the Child Tax Credit, which would lift a half-million children out of poverty and benefit 16 million children in families that otherwise wouldn’t receive the full credit. Now on to the Senate, where it is sadly stalled.

A renter tax credit that hasn’t made headway would help people in or near poverty no longer pay over 30 percent of their income for rent. We can bring hope by asking those who represent us to pass these and other ladders out of poverty. Our future depends on our children and they are depending on us to push Congress to action.

─ Willie Dickerson, Snohomish

Letter to the editor

March 20, 2024

Editor,

The modern pace of life makes it seem like there is no time to reach out to make a difference, but there is always five minutes to speak up for children. Imagine America having the highest poverty rates among the rich countries in our world, especially since we are the richest. Millions of children in our country are facing hunger, homelessness and lack of quality health care.

Right now the U.S. Senate seems too busy to take action on the House bill that would lift half a million children out of poverty, while giving a hand up to 16 million more. But if we raise our voices, calling on Senators [Patty] Murray and [Maria] Cantwell to speak to leadership to get the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act passed, we can make a difference. Both of our senators support this action, but hearing from us reminds them how important this is. A call to them, (202) 224-3121, can help move this bill and create a better future for millions of children.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish

Efforts to confront homelessness encouraging

April 19, 2024

Thanks to The Herald for its efforts to battle homelessness, along with the poverty and drug problems that are both cause and effect of it (“At Herald Forum, experts affirm Housing First model, despite downsides,” The Herald, April 13).

This difficult challenge both locally and nationally needs this kind of attention, leading to action to alleviate this crisis. We can be proud of the local efforts to deal with this problem, including housing and services that follow-up, with the housing first model, and social workers more available to deal with this crisis. Nationally, Reps. Suzan DelBene and Rick Larsen, along with both Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, have been working hard to get funding for this issue, including more affordable housing. Also, a renter tax credit, to help keep people housed is being considered.

Meantime the U.S. House passed the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, with a large bipartisan majority, and is waiting for Senate action. This bill would increase the Child Tax Credit, lifting 400,000 children out of poverty and reaching 16 million more in the throws of poverty. So thanks again to The Herald, local service providers, and our members of Congress for bringing hope to this critical problem.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish

https://www.heraldnet.com/opinion/efforts-to-confront-homelessness-encouraging/
Don’t penalize those without shelter

April 23, 2024

Of the approximately 650,000 people that meet Housing and Urban Development’s definition of homeless, approximately 40 percent are sleeping outside tonight. It’s not that they’re avid stargazers; they have no choice. There is another case before the Supreme Court soon that hasn’t drawn nearly as much attention as the presidential immunity case. Probably because it involves those struggling with homelessness we don’t want to think about.

Grant’s Pass v. Johnson started in 2018 when a small town in Oregon began ticketing people for sleeping outside with a pillow, or blanket or cardboard. The tickets were $150. On appeal, the 9th Circuit Court or Appeals found that this violated the Eighth Amendment’s ban on cruel and unusual punishment to arrest or fine somebody for sleeping outside when they have no place else to go. We are not going to arrest our way out of homelessness.

The push to criminalize homelessness is happening across the country. Bills against “unlawful camping” are awaiting the outcome of Grants Pass v. Johnson.

I am proud of Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., and her tireless efforts to encourage the building of low-income housing stock to meet the demands of those we avert our eyes from now. There are many proven, data-backed solutions to homelessness such as the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act that will keep people on the edge of homelessness in their homes. We can do better than making the problem invisible, we can make it go away.

— Mary Minor, Snohomish

https://www.heraldnet.com/opinion/dont-penalize-those-without-shelter/
Childrens' poverty can be reduced

Food Insecurity

April 24, 2024

Looking at the beautiful colors and smiling children at the Easter Parade (April 3 Tribune), it is hard to imagine the poverty in our country and around the world that causes 45 million children to suffer from malnutrition.

Fortunately, Congress can do something about it. In our state alone, 273,000 children would benefit from the proposed bipartisan Tax Child Credit Expansion that has already passed the House by an overwhelming majority of both parties. Thanks to our Reps. Suzan DelBene and Rick Larsen for their work on this. Sens. Murray and Cantwell favor this bill, the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, but need our calls of support, 202-224-3121, to convince Senate leadership to bring it up and fellow senators to pass it. Global nutrition is another effort that can be increased with our voices saying it matters. Wouldn't it be great to see these parade type smiles on all children?

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish

Speak up to boost child care

April 30, 2024

The sad state of child care in America is well illustrated in the recent article, “America’s child care crisis is holding back moms without college degrees,” The Columbian, April 23). Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., counts child care as one of her top priorities.

Take a moment to thank her for that, and at the same time ask her to speak to leadership about bringing up the bipartisan Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, which the House overwhelmingly passed nearly three months ago. This legislation will lift 400,000 children out of poverty and help 16 million others with their daily survival struggle, including over 100,000 in Washington and Oregon. It will also help families pay for child care.

Speak up, 202-224-3121, to those who represent you, send them this article and say it is time for action, our children matter.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish

Rents Are Unaffordable Nationwide. A Renter’s Tax Credit Could Help.

By Ashley Dines

May 2, 2024

I spent my first birthday in a shelter. Decades later, after doing all I was supposed to do to lift myself up out of poverty, I’m sofa hopping with my children.

I live in Las Vegas, where I work on a program helping low-income women and children find support to keep a roof over their heads and food in their bellies. When I enrolled in the program myself, the supervisors recognized my ability to lead and offered me this job.

I love my work, and the pay is solidly above minimum wage. Given my humble beginnings, anyone would say I’m a success story. Except I’m currently homeless.

The Rent Burden and Living Paycheck-to-Paycheck

Rents are astronomically high. In Las Vegas, the average household now needs to make at least $70,000 a year to afford rent. I make a decent full-time salary — but not that much.

It’s not a problem unique to me or to Vegas. According to the Low-Income Housing Coalition, there is no state or county in the United States where someone working full-time at minimum wage can afford a modest two-bedroom apartment.

When a huge chunk of your paycheck goes to rent or the mortgage, there’s little leftover for an emergency. And most Americans — 56% of us — can’t pay for an unexpected emergency of $1,000. A surprise dental bill, medical bill, or car repair can send us spiraling into poverty.

A Perfect Storm of Crises
That’s what happened to me. My mother had to be hospitalized, I separated from my children's father, and my car broke down. I lost everything — almost literally overnight.

I first had to help my mother. She was my childcare provider, but she’s now disabled. Then my cell phone bill payments lapsed for two months, and I had to pay in full to keep my only source of communication turned on. I had to fix my car to get to work and get the kids where they needed to go. Legal bills piled up from trying to secure custody and child support.

I quickly fell behind on rent. The next thing I know, the constable was at my door — forcing me, my two kids, and my disabled mother out of the apartment and down the stairs. That proved too challenging for my mother, and I had to take her back to the hospital immediately.

**Calls for Policy Solutions: Expanded Tax Credits and Rental Assistance**

Again, I work full time and make decent money. But many people are like me — we fall into the gap where our income is too high for assistance but too low for living.

Often, just a little bit of help could keep us from falling into homelessness, joblessness, or worse. If rental assistance were expanded to people making less than a housing wage, or if the pandemic-era expanded Child Tax Credit were still in place, I wouldn't have been evicted.

We need to bring that expanded Child Tax Credit back. Antipoverty organizations are also calling for a new Renter's Tax Credit.

**The Case for a Renter’s Tax Credit**

Unlike homeowners who get a mortgage tax credit, renters don't get any tax benefit for paying month after month. With a Renter's Tax Credit, renters who pay more than 30 percent of our paychecks on housing would get a monthly credit to bring their housing costs down to that percentage.

That would help more of us stay in our homes, keep our jobs, and afford basics like food and child care. It could also reduce the need for more complicated safety net supports.
If we want everyone to have a fair chance to thrive, we can start now by ensuring access to stable, affordable housing.

*Ashley Dines is a mother of two and an expert on poverty with RESULTS from Las Vegas, Nevada. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*

https://favs.news/rents-are-unaffordable-nationwide-a-renters-tax-credit-could-help/
Child care crisis: Nurture our country’s future

May 24, 2024

Re: “Can the child care crisis be fixed? Q&A with U.S. Sen. Patty Murray” [May 21, Local News]:

Families across the country are grateful for U.S. Sen. Patty Murray’s continuing efforts to solve the child care crisis.

Another effort the senator is making is to pass the bipartisan Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act that would help 16 million children in low-income families. This legislation would provide an increase to the child tax credit and could be used by families to help pay for child care and other necessities.

We can help by sending Sen. Murray our personal stories of how this makes a difference, or just thanking her for her efforts on behalf of children and families. After all, the children are the future of our country.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish

Changes ahead for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)?

June 2024

Last month I told you about how SNAP recipients can double their purchasing power at local farmer’s markets with the Market Match. The health benefits of locally grown fresh food cannot be overstated.

This year Congress is considering changes to SNAP benefits as part of the “Farm Bill”. There are those in the House of Representatives that want to cut SNAP benefits by $30 billion over ten years at a time when the average recipient is receiving $7 per day and grocery prices have increased 25% since 2020.

I was a naturopathic doctor in Alaska when the USDA loosened its regulations and allowed hunters and fishermen to donate to nursing homes in Native villages. The subsistence diet is of great significance in Alaska Native culture. It was huge. Not only for the elders that received the donations but also to the people providing for them. Nothing says home like the foods you grew up with.

Since retiring and moving to the lower “four dozen”, I have volunteered and been a customer at the Snohomish Community Food Bank. I see the smiles on faces speaking other languages, whether Russian, Ukrainian, Spanish, among others, when offered a food that says home to them. Although we make an effort to include foods that cover lots of ethnicities, we can’t do much more than the basic staples. That is one of the benefits of SNAP.

You know what your family will and won’t eat. SNAP is a critical part of the food safety network. We want to increase food options. Many communities lack access to nutritious, fresh food (food deserts). Restricting the foods that SNAP recipients can
buy leads to increased hunger. Current restrictions, for example, on hot food purchases, effects peoples with disabilities and unhoused people tremendously.

The Snohomish County Food Coalition reports that in recent years, visits to food banks and pantries have increased by 61%. Everyone deserves to live healthier lives and have access to nutritious foods. An integral tool to ensure that all Americans have access to basic nutrition is SNAP.

**Contacting your member of Congress is easy.**

Call 202-224-3121

If you don’t know who your legislator is, the operator will ask for your zip code and will connect you to the right office.

Ask your representative and senators to strengthen and protect SNAP by expanding access to the program and increasing benefit amounts.

No online link
Grads can find meaning in life by volunteering

June 9, 2024

In the season of graduations, students get plenty of advice about the “real world” looming in their future (“5 thoughts for grads as the enter ‘the real world,” The Herald, May 18).

Finding meaningful work that pays the rent is a great idea, but sometimes hard to find. In the meantime, many opportunities exist for volunteering to make a difference. Sam Daley-Harris’ new book “Reclaiming Our Democracy” offers a path to do just that. Through his efforts to reach solutions for poverty (results.org) and climate change (citizensclimatelobby.org) he has created organizations that make a difference by working with our members of Congress. People of all ages join these groups, finding new friends, new understandings, and a path to make a better world for everyone. This is a great opportunity for anyone, including new graduates!

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish

https://www.heraldnet.com/opinion/grads-can-find-meaning-in-life-by-volunteering/
Martha Wiley's letter clearly states the facts of poverty and child hunger in Clark County (“Show compassion for children,” Our Readers’ Views, June 19). Sadly, the rest of the country has similar poverty-causing hunger.

SNAP benefits could provide more relief if the amounts were updated to cover current food costs. This is where we can take action. As Congress considers a new farm bill, which includes SNAP, we can ask lawmakers to reject efforts to cut or restrict SNAP. Instead, ask them to work to make it stronger by expanding access and increasing benefits for vulnerable populations.

Why do this? Because too many children are hungry, and our voices can guide those who represent us to turn this around. Our children deserve enough to eat, creating a better future for them and the country.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish

Safety nets for SNAP food benefits being improved

June 26, 2024

To the Editor:

Great to see summer meal programs available for kids who face the challenge of hunger. (“Summer meal programs keep kids fed,” June 19 Tribune)

Wouldn’t it be great to get beyond the hunger issue that plagues millions of children and adults across America? The SNAP program battles hunger, but needs to be increased in the current farm bill being debated now in Congress. We can call or write our representatives and ask them to do just that. Rep. Suzan DelBene understands that the food stamp program needs to be increased, she lived on it for a short time to learn about the shortfall first hand. So take a moment to thank and encourage her and Rep. Rick Larsen, along with both Senators Murray and Cantwell, who are working hard to make SNAP more effective. America’s children will create a better future if they have enough to eat.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish

West Virginia media
CTC can help end child hunger

By Josephine Reece

March 2, 2024

According to Hunger Free WV, one in nine West Virginians go hungry every day, and one in seven children in our state are dealing with food insecurity.

As a pediatrician working in West Virginia and globally in sub-Saharan Africa, I see how hunger impacts children and families. In children, we know that hunger can lead to stunted growth, developmental delays, hyperactivity, anxiety and aggression, but it also puts them at risk for chronic diseases such as anemia and asthma. And these risks are not just related to longstanding hunger — we see these conditions develop even in kids who experience multiple brief episodes of food insecurity.

Hunger is heartbreaking for a number of reasons — not the least of which is that we have the means to do better. One proven solution to alleviate hunger, especially among children, is through an expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC). A previous expansion of the CTC in 2021 was extremely effective in addressing hunger.

An overwhelming majority of families with low incomes reported using the expanded benefit during that time to meet basic needs, such as paying the rent and purchasing groceries. According to the Food Research and Action Center, the 2021 CTC expansion resulted in a 26% drop in food insufficiency nationwide. But when this expansion lapsed at the end of that year, these gains evaporated.

Thankfully, a renewed CTC expansion is included in the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act that passed in the House of Representatives with an overwhelming bipartisan majority in late January. The current proposed CTC expansions are not as extensive as those in 2021, but if enacted into law now, it is estimated that families making less than $60,000 could see their CTC increase an average of $900 per year. This is a significant increase that will make it easier for millions of parents across the country and right here in West Virginia to care for their families and make sure their kids won't go hungry.
Contrary to false claims, the CTC expansion in the tax bill does not increase unemployment, does not add to the deficit and does not give new benefits to undocumented immigrants.

What this bill does is grant a pathway for more families with low incomes, including those with multiple children, to access the full amount of the credit. It is estimated that the families of 16 million children nationwide would see some increase in their benefit, and the families of 500,000 more children would have the tools to lift themselves above the poverty line.

As a member of the Ways and Means Committee, U.S. Rep. Carol Miller (R-W.Va.) was a key supporter in advancing Child Tax Credit expansions in the tax bill. Rep. Alex Mooney (R-W.Va.) joined her in voting in favor of this legislation just weeks ago. But now, this measure is waiting for the Senate to take action before families facing hunger will be able to take advantage of the CTC expansion when they file their taxes this spring.

This bill is a good step in improving the lives of children and families experiencing hunger. Sens. Shelley Moore Capito and Joe Manchin should support the passage of the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act now to relieve food insecurity for children and families in West Virginia.

Josephine Reece, MD, is a founding member of the West Virginia chapter of RESULTS, a grassroots, non-partisan antipoverty movement that focuses on domestic and global polices to end poverty, which is the greatest social determinant of health. A native West Virginian and WVU alum, she splits her time as a pediatrician and internist practicing here at home in West Virginia and globally in resource-limited countries, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa.

https://www.dominionpost.com/2024/03/02/guest-essay-ctc-can-help-end-child-hunger/
Families need tax relief

March 21, 2024

Spring is a wonderful season of renewal, and it's also full of excitement for my family as we confirm our summer vacation plans. Over the years, this has included many wonderful trips both within our state and beyond.

As grateful as we are for these special moments, I have lately noticed that something as simple as a short family vacation is getting further out of reach for many families. It's not only that the price of rentals has increased, but the cost of about everything else has, too. When you're trying to raise a family, that limits options for any annual summer getaway.

Congress can help parents across the country by passing the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, which includes much needed expansions of the Child Tax Credit (CTC). If enacted into law, it is estimated that families making less than $60,000 could see their CTC increase an average of $900 per year. This bill passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in the House back in January, but now it's stalled in the Senate.

When families can't afford food or housing, a nice vacation is out of the question. With so many incredible opportunities for outdoor recreation in North Central West Virginia, this impacts the local economy.

I thank Rep. Alex Mooney for his support of the tax package and urge Senators Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito to do the same and see that this gets a vote in the upper chamber as soon as possible.

— Joanna DiStefano, Morgantown

https://www.wvnews.com/theet/opinion/letterstoeditor/families-need-tax-relief/article_e60f6bc6-e7f5-11ee-b6fc-7f2e6a5efb05.html
Capito, Manchin must support CTC bill

March 31, 2024

Rep. Alex Mooney was part of the overwhelming bipartisan majority voting in favor of the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act that passed in the House of Representatives in late January. This tax bill expands the Child Tax Credit (CTC) for families with low income and is a good step in improving the lives of children experiencing poverty.

If enacted into law, it is estimated that families making less than $60,000 could see their CTC increase an average of $900 per year. This will make it easier for millions of parents across the country and right here in West Virginia to pay the rent and put food on the table.

I know this to be true because I am one of these families. Just last year my husband, my kids and I were homeless, living in a 10-man tent, not being able to stay afloat, paying for food, clothes, bills or rent. The CTC will provide stability and peace of mind to my family and many others.

The expansion does not increase unemployment, does not add to the deficit and does not give new benefits to undocumented immigrants, despite false claims to the contrary.

We can all agree that it’s a good thing when Democrats and Republicans come together to help kids get the best start in life. Sens. Shelley Moore Capito and Joe Manchin should follow Rep. Mooney’s lead and support the passage of the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act now.

— Christiana Stalnaker, RESULTS WV Volunteer Advocate, Four States, Marion County

https://www.dominionpost.com/2024/03/30/march-31-letters-to-the-editor/
Lawmakers should spend a night in a homeless shelter

*Maybe then they’d drop their opposition to even modest tax credits for low-income people like the ones I work with.*

**By Tiffany Tagbo**

April 25, 2024

If there’s one thing I could tell lawmakers, it would be to bring back the expanded, monthly, fully refundable Child Tax Credit.

Those monthly payments of up to $300 per child cut child poverty nearly in half in just a few months. And when the credit expired in late 2021, child poverty immediately shot back up. So we know it works.

Lawmakers are now considering a more modest expansion. It doesn’t go far enough, but it could lift another 400,000 kids out of poverty — children like the ones I worked with.

I grew up walking the fine line of having something and nothing all at the same time. I’ve experienced tumultuous times as an adult, and I’ve worked with people experiencing poverty and homelessness. I can tell lawmakers firsthand no matter which side of the coin families end up on, legislation and programs such as the Child Tax Credit, SNAP, WIC, and other safety net programs make a difference.

When I was growing up, my mother worked several minimum-wage jobs and relied on social programs to fill the gaps left by low wages. As a result, my siblings and I never had to sleep on the streets, go to school hungry, or wear tattered clothing like many children do.

With that help, I went on to graduate from the University of Central Oklahoma with a bachelor’s degree. Eventually, I became a Child Welfare Investigator at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services following up on claims of neglect and abuse.
While I saw some of both, many of these cases were simply the conditions of poverty. Many caseworkers had never experienced poverty and couldn’t make the distinction, but I could. Unfortunately, poverty landed many children in the child welfare system.

With decent pay and benefits, I was able to buy a house. But the work was soul-crushing and I eventually burned out.

You do everything right, and still — boom! You’re knocked right down. One day you are employed with a good salary and benefits, the next you are unemployed without the means to afford the basics, even with a college degree. Married, pregnant, and unable to find decent work, I relied on SNAP and Medicaid to get by — barely.

My job changed, but the clients I work with haven’t.

Poverty puts them in impossible situations. They must choose between food or shelter, medical care or poor health, running water or electricity. It’s a vicious cycle of suffering.

Without a fixed address or help navigating the system, families can’t always access assistance programs that would help them.

If my clients had the expanded monthly Child Tax Credit, many could have afforded housing, clothing and food — and escaped the cruel cycle of poverty. In his recent budget proposal, President Biden called on Congress to restore the expanded, pandemic-era Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit that lifted tens of millions out of poverty in 2021.

A newer bipartisan tax proposal before the Senate would help. It would modestly expand the Child Tax Credit, lifting 400,000 kids out of poverty and helping 16 million overall.

The bill passed the House with an overwhelming bipartisan majority but has stalled in the Senate, where some senators are blocking it for political gain. Families deserve better. The time for delay is over. The Senate needs to vote.

I challenge lawmakers to live on the $6 a day that SNAP recipients do, or to come and spend just one night in a shelter. Once they experience these hardships, they’ll restore the expanded Child Tax Credit faster than they can say “expand it.” Perhaps this should be a requirement of the job.
We must make our voices heard and speak for those who are silenced and often left out of policy discussion. We must restore the Child Tax Credit expansion and ensure the thriving of all children.

*Tiffany Tagbo is a mother of two from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and an expert on poverty with RESULTS. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*

https://www.fayettetribune.com/opinion/lawmakers-should-spend-a-night-in-a-homeless-shelter/article_f2075c42-0332-11ef-b54d-1f79b597cd78.html
Senate cannot delay vote on child tax credit

April 28, 2024

It is imperative for the U.S. Senate to take immediate action and expand the child tax credit. How long must families wait? Nearly two months have passed since the House passed a bipartisan child tax credit enhancement and sent it to the Senate.

This legislation is expected to benefit 16 million low-income children, including 5.8 million under age 6. After the fully enlarged CTC expired in 2021, this law makes great progress against child poverty. Many families with children are struggling while waiting for tax refunds. This money is crucial for many families to pay bills, fix cars, purchase clothes and shoes for their kids and eat.

About 104 people in Fairmont depend on the Soup Opera for food and clothing. These households received 39,000 meals from the organization. The Fairmont Union Mission serves 36,000 meals yearly.

The CTC will comfort many families. It’s shocking that Congress doesn’t want to lower taxes on families and small companies during an election year. Only a few senators are blocking it for political reasons. Long waits for Congress to pass a generally favored and desperately needed item frustrate families. Senators must explain their motives. If passed, the law will benefit families. If it fails, senators must explain to voters why they keep children poor.

Both parties favor the plan, but a few senators are blocking it in the Senate. Families eagerly await. Senators should disclose their views. When the Senate returns to Washington, I urge our senators to demand a quick vote and support the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act.

— Christiana Stalnaker, Fairmont

Senators should seize opportunity to boost small business and help W.Va. kids

By Kent A. Leonhardt

May 17, 2024

At a time of so much division and gridlock, lawmakers in Washington recently surprised Americans with some good news.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation to expand the Child Tax Credit and badly needed tax relief for small businesses through the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024.

This bipartisan deal is worth celebrating. It could help millions of children living near the poverty line while also boosting our economy. Crucially, it does all this without adding to the budget deficit.

However, the legislation is stalled in the U.S. Senate.

I urge our senators, Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito, to endorse and help push this legislation to the finish line, giving significant benefits to our small businesses and working families.

A quarter of West Virginia’s kids are estimated to live in poverty. That’s a moral failure. As our state’s commissioner of agriculture, I think every day about how we can ensure that hungry kids are fed and that rural families can find good livelihoods. But too many children in our state are still facing extreme hardship and losing opportunities for their future. The Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act would pull at least 500,000 children nationwide above the poverty line and provide benefits to 16 million low-income families with children. Here in West Virginia, it would help at least 87,000 children, whose families’ incomes are too low to qualify for the existing Child Tax Credit.

There’s a strong economic case for this legislation. I often meet with business owners, farmers, and others who regularly face a tough choice: expand their workforce or prioritize investments in essential equipment. The Tax Relief for American Families
and Workers Act allows American companies to deduct research and development expenses and write off a larger portion of their equipment investments upfront. These provisions help our businesses survive and grow — which, in turn, helps alleviate poverty.

While this is a bill to fight poverty, it’s not another big government spending program. It’s fundamentally about tax relief. It’s fully funded by terminating the Employee Retention Tax Credit – a COVID-era program that was marked by cost overruns and fraud. That’s why Republican leaders including Newt Gingrich, Mike Huckabee, and Rick Santorum, tax reduction advocates, and major pro-life groups, among others, have strongly backed the deal.

Senators need to recognize that time is short. With the 2017 Trump tax cuts expiring next year, there may not be another chance to pass these reforms.

Washington needs to get this one right. I see immense value in this bill: It offers a meaningful opportunity to address child poverty and stimulate economic growth, without contributing to the deficit. It is a win-win for West Virginia and the nation.

Kent A. Leonhardt is West Virginia commissioner of agriculture.

{Submission of this op-ed was facilitated by RESULTS staff and ally organizations.}

National media
Feel-good policies

January 2024

Thanks for the inspirations stories of members making a difference by helping others [“Be the change,”, December 2023]. We can each do something – smile at others, take a moment to help in simple ways, talk to your members of Congress to encourage legislation that you believe will make a difference. Using our voices can make a difference.

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, Washington

https://www.costcoconnection.com/january_2024/page2.html
In the World’s Wealthiest Country, Housing Should Be a Human Right and a Community Builder

The focus on zoning, commerce, and profit-maximization does a disservice to the rich sense of community affordable housing can create.

By Kazmyn Ramos / OtherWords

January 2, 2024

Too many of us have to depend on sheer good luck to make it — especially when it comes to putting a roof over our heads.

We grow up hearing that hard work alone will lift us above the hardships we’re born into. But many of us also watched as our parents worked two and three jobs, relied on extended family to watch us, and still struggled to afford stable housing. Far too many of us are living that same struggle ourselves.

It’s not that we aren’t resourceful. My grandmother, who barely scraped by with factory work and countless odd jobs, pulled together with neighbors who supported each other through a mutual aid network. Thanks to her resourcefulness, our community, and luck, we had someplace to call home. That gave my mother the chance to become the first one in our family to go to college. I followed in her footsteps to attend graduate school.

We made it work. But I’ve learned through generational poverty that the lack of affordable housing is one of the biggest obstacles to thriving. I learned even more through my work with Healthy Families, a national, research-backed program.

I conducted home visits with low-income mothers, addressing maternal health, birth outcomes, and child development. Their poverty was different from what I grew up with. Many of these mothers were immigrants with language barriers and no access to the extended networks, mutual aid, or stable housing that I had.

Evictions were rampant. I saw conditions that you wouldn't believe existed in the richest country in the world.
I'm a strong believer in mutual aid. But in the world's wealthiest nation, should we really have to rely solely on working people sharing their meager resources among themselves? To eradicate poverty and housing instability, we're going to need more than that.

Nationally, a worker would need an hourly wage of at least $28.58 to afford a modest two-bedroom rental — or nearly $24 an hour for just one bedroom. The federal minimum wage is $7.25 per hour. Almost half of low-income renters spend over 30 percent of their incomes on housing alone.

Building on my mother and grandmother's work in mutual aid, I've found community engagement to be invaluable — not only to connect families to housing, but also to organize our collective voices to push lawmakers toward solutions.

Solutions like building more affordable housing, more public housing, and more housing in general. Guaranteeing workers a living wage for their hard work. Making sure we have a strong social safety net so families can survive lean times.

Unfortunately, housing policy often takes human rights and the need for community out of the policy process. It focuses on zoning, commerce, profit-maximization, and “protecting” wealthy communities from low-income neighbors. This does a disservice to the rich sense of community affordable housing can create.

Housing should be seen as a human right and a community builder, not a wealth builder. It should be a way to lift us all up rather than segregate us and perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

The more we separate ourselves from our fellow humans, the more damage we do to all of us as a society. My mother and grandmother taught me that. I bet yours did too. So let's work together to make the dream of housing for all a reality.

*Kazmyn Ramos is a Program Manager for an NGO that delivers cash to people in poverty, founder of the affordable housing nonprofit Seeking 1610, and a Poverty Expert at RESULTS. She lives in Indianapolis. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*

https://scheerpost.com/2024/01/02/in-the-worlds-wealthiest-country-housing-should-be-a-human-right-and-a-community-builder/

Reprinted in:
The Child Tax Credit Changed My Life. Lawmakers Have a Chance to Bring It Back.

Poverty is a policy choice by lawmakers with warped priorities. Now they have a chance to choose better, if only modestly.

January 17, 2024

By Clara Moore

From childhood on, I've spent my life haunted by the ghost of poverty.

A myth exists in America that financial well-being follows if we just work hard and make good choices. But it's not that simple. At some point, most of us face unforeseen obstacles — from physical or mental health challenges to lost jobs, economic downturns, and natural disasters.

Along with low wages and other structural causes of poverty, that puts financial well-being out of reach for about 140 million people in this country, the Poor People's Campaign estimates.

The reality of poverty isn't even close to the stereotype propagated by politicians who want only to fund the military and subsidize the rich while cutting everything else. This isn't a lifestyle one chooses by being lazy and getting fat off some mythical government largesse.

For many of us, poverty means working multiple low-wage jobs and still being short on rent, child care, food, or the energy bill. Poverty means you don't have stable transportation and live in fear of anyone in your family needing health care.

It means your children go without good winter boots or new clothes because you need the lights to stay on. It means there's no time or money for anything beyond the scrape of daily life — no waterparks, no road trips, no relief.
People don't choose this lifestyle. It's created by policymakers who prioritize corporate profit and bloated military spending over investing in families in this country. Yet they expect poor people to be the ones who feel ashamed.

At one point I was living the American Dream. I'd been a successful chef, even bought a house at 23. But the 2008 collapse flipped my mortgage upside down, and the single investment I'd been able to make for my future crumbled.

A few years later, after the birth of my child, I was cast back into the same poverty I’d grown up with. Programs like Medicaid, SNAP, and WIC — the program to support women, infants, and children — kept our heads above water while I returned to university to complete an unfinished Bachelor’s degree. But our heads dipped under a few times. It was exhausting.

By the time I’d completed a graduate program and we’d eeked out some stability, the pandemic hit. But this time, the help was different.

The expanded and enhanced Child Tax Credit in President Biden's American Rescue Plan not only helped me pay my rent and monthly bills — it helped me be a better mom. Relieved of some financial anxiety, I could spend more time with my daughter and commit to the post-graduate job search, ultimately getting the good job that I have today.

Now I’m financially stable for the first time in my life. But tens of millions of others won’t get that same chance unless lawmakers act. Congress let the expanded Child Tax Credit expire at the end of 2021, even though it had cut child poverty in half. Subsequently, child poverty immediately skyrocketed — a disaster.

But now, Congress again has a chance to expand the Child Tax Credit in a tax package that may pass soon. Frustratingly, the package gives more tax breaks to corporations that already pay little to no taxes, even as it modestly expands the Child Tax Credit again — although by less than before — and improves the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the new credit would lift 400,000 children out of poverty, make 3 million children less poor, and help a substantial number of the remaining 19 million poor children currently excluded from the full benefit.
It's necessary, but not enough — too much money in the bill goes to corporations that don't need it. Again, investment priorities are skewed in favor of the wealthy and corporations.

It's only when we prioritize the well-being of families that we will see families thrive.

*Clara Moore is a researcher and mom who lives in Newark, New Jersey. She shares her experiences in poverty as an advocate with RESULTS Educational Fund. All opinions expressed are her own and do not represent her employer. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*

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**THE GOOD MEN PROJECT**

**INEQUALITY**
https://inequality.org/research/child-tax-credit-2024/

Lawmakers Must Fully Fund the WIC Program

Half of all babies — including mine — rely on this essential program. But unless Congress acts, millions could face food insecurity.

By Candace Baker

January 31, 2024

When my grandmother was raising my cousins and me, she taught us to work hard and go after what we wanted. I didn't know it at the time, but we were in poverty.

Scared of judgment and bureaucracy, my grandmother refused to apply for assistance programs. But that meant she had to work several jobs, day and night, bringing us with her because she couldn't afford child care. We barely got by — and enjoyed no time together outside of work and school.

We thought that's how everyone lived. Your grandma works around the clock and still can't make ends meet. That's life, right? But as I got older, I saw that other kids had new clothes, after-school activities, and time to play.

I wanted that. And most of all, I wanted to help my grandmother so that she could have it too. So I vowed to get a college education and a good-paying job helping others.

If I wanted to achieve my dream of helping my family, I knew I'd have to do something different. I'd heard about a program that helped pregnant and postpartum moms and their babies, the Special Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children, also known as WIC.

I almost didn’t apply because when I tried to enroll in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), I ran into the same judgment and bureaucratic stumbling blocks my grandmother feared. But I knew I needed help — and so did my baby.

And let me tell you — WIC was a game-changer!
WIC not only provides nutritious foods but also nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and even health care referrals for low-income mothers and small children. It helps to reduce maternal and infant mortality and improves health outcomes so children have the best chance at a healthy and productive life.

I also was able to get the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help with our food needs. And because of these programs, I was able to go back to school, get my high school diploma, enroll in college, and graduate Magna Cum Laude. I was even able to become a volunteer mentor with a federally funded program called Second Chance to help people who served prison time reenter society in a healthy, productive way.

Families like mine are everywhere — about half of all babies born in the United States benefit from WIC.

It turns out that most of us just need a little help at especially difficult times in our lives. If wages had kept pace with the rising cost of living, rent, and food, perhaps we wouldn't need assistance programs. But wages haven't kept pace with living costs in 50 years.

For the past 25 years, WIC has served every eligible family that applied for its critical services. But now it's in danger — Congress hasn't agreed to fund the program to meet the needs of all who are eligible. There's a $1 billion shortfall, which means that 2 million pregnant and postpartum women and their little ones won't get necessary food and health assistance.

Imagine all those families that will face food insecurity, childbirth complications, and negative impacts on their health and well being that can last a lifetime — even generations.

I now have four children. All four benefited greatly from the WIC program, just as all who are eligible deserve to do. I believe in everything WIC does — I even took a job there helping with breastfeeding support. I'm also an Expert on Poverty at the anti-poverty organization RESULTS. These opportunities allow me to advocate for the programs that supported me when I was in need.

I need your help to ensure that Congress does the same. We must fully fund the WIC program so that no eligible family is turned away.
Candace Baker is a mother, fierce advocate for anti-poverty programs, and Expert on Poverty at RESULTS from Indianapolis, Indiana. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

https://otherwords.org/fully-fund-the-wic-program/

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**EURASIAREVIEW**
https://www.eurasiareview.com/07022024-lawmakers-must-fully-fund-the-wic-program-oped/

**INEQUALITY**
Having a Child Shouldn’t Cause Financial Catastrophe

In the wealthiest country on earth, welcoming a child should be a joy for families — not a financial trauma.

By Lindsay K. Saunders

February 14, 2024

I had a baby in 2021 and quickly learned how parenting and child care expenses add up.

My husband and I had saved up for months to afford my unpaid maternity leave — I kept working even after my water broke because we needed every penny. It was a dream come true to have a career that I was proud of and finally be welcoming a child into our lives.

But I had no idea how hard it would really be.

While I was on unpaid maternity leave that cost us our health benefits, my husband was let go from his job. Already reliant on WIC — the federal food aid program for women, infants, and children — we were forced to go to food pantries, apply for Medicaid, and referred to a diaper bank. We were in survival mode: exhausted, stressed out, and worried.

Despite a litany of postpartum complications that continue to plague me more than two years later, I ended up only taking seven weeks of leave before I returned to work out of desperation.

I wondered: Why doesn't the U.S. have a paid parental leave policy?

Instead, my first and only experience with motherhood was marred by stress and trauma. Again and again, I had to choose between my health and a paycheck, which can feel like a punishment. I'd proudly served my country on a one-year assignment overseas working on foreign aid, and it didn't matter.
We found child care at a loving, quality child care center, but the tuition kept increasing. Now the monthly cost is almost twice our mortgage. In fact, child care costs exceed college tuition where we live in North Carolina, as well as in at least 27 other states. My stomach gets in a knot every six months when I know the tuition will increase again.

I wondered: Why don’t we invest more in early care and education?

Meanwhile, the crises causing outsized harm to families throughout the pandemic compounded: a diaper shortage, a formula shortage, inflation, and wages that wouldn’t keep up. So many people are struggling to get back on their feet and desperately need balance and some peace of mind. The stress took its toll, and my husband and I separated in spring 2023.

I wondered: If only we’d had more support, would we have made it?

I have an advanced degree and work as a communications director at a nonprofit while also freelancing. After paying for necessities, we have nothing left, so I get food and supplies from neighbors and friends. I work so hard as a single mom to try to achieve the dreams I have for myself and my baby boy — the dreams that all mothers have. I don’t want my child to deal with the stress and constant refrain of “we don’t have the money for that,” like I did growing up.

Families desperately need, want, and deserve better. Welcoming a child should never be the reason a family plunges into poverty, especially in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We shouldn’t be sacrificing health, quality early learning, or stability in exchange for a roof over our heads and food. Instead, we should be building strong foundations and generational wealth for our kids.

We need federally mandated paid parental and medical leave. We need additional dedicated funding for programs like WIC that support over 6 million families.

And we need to continue expanding the Child Tax Credit. In North Carolina alone, the monthly Child Tax Credits received in 2021 helped the families of 140,000 children lift themselves out of poverty. Nationally, the credit cut child poverty by over 40 percent before Congress let the pandemic expansion expire at the end of 2021.
Congress must put our tax dollars and policies toward strong support for families. Let's ensure no parent experiences welcoming a child as a financial catastrophe and make this country a place where families prosper.

*Lindsay K. Saunders is a North Carolina mother and dedicated advocate for RESULTS Educational Fund, a national anti-poverty organization. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*


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**INEQUALITY.org**  
Final Push to Save Expanded Child Tax Credit as Senate Hopes Dim

The bipartisan tax package, which sailed through the House in January, is projected to benefit 16 million poor children in the first year.

By Linda Jacobson

March 26, 2024

The last time Congress increased the child tax credit — during the pandemic — Sarah Izabel used the extra cash to enroll her son in an afterschool program so she could apply to graduate school.

“If my son was home, then I would be taking care of him,” said the Stanford University student, who’s now working on a doctorate in neuroscience. “These programs really support people as they’re improving their lives.”

She was among the parents and advocates who celebrated in January when the oft-gridlocked House overwhelmingly passed a tax package that includes a new increase for the program — one that experts project would benefit roughly 16 million poor children in the first year. But the plan has hit an unexpected wall in the Senate where some Republicans are hoping to kill it.

Sarah Izabel used the pandemic-era child tax credit to send her son to an afterschool program so she could spend time on her graduate school application. (Sarah Izabel)

“The chamber we never thought we would be waiting on is the Senate,” said Ariel Taylor Smith, senior director of policy and action for the National Parents Union, one of several organizations ramping up pressure on skeptical Republicans before they return from recess April 8. She’s opposed to lawmakers revising the bill in order to appease opponents. “It will delay aid for families at a time when peanut butter costs $8.”
If the measure doesn't pass, it could be well over a year before Congress takes up a similar proposal. That's when they'll consider renewing the Trump-era tax law, which doubled the child tax credit to $2,000 and expires at the end of 2025. But advocates say families need “more breathing room” now as inflation continues to strain household budgets. The proposed child tax credit, which would apply to the 2023 taxes families are filing this spring, is not as expansive as one Congress passed in 2021. But experts say it would help bring down child poverty, which has jumped since the larger benefit ran out.

“I think this is the best chance we have of passing the tax package this year,” said Elyssa Schmier, a vice president for government relations with MomsRising, an advocacy group. “We hear from families every day that are struggling to afford child care, medicine for their children, groceries and rent. Any way we can provide them support... in a timely manner, not only benefits moms, families and children, but the local economy as well.”

The 2021 pandemic credit, which allowed families to receive up to $3,600 per child, split into monthly payments, cut child poverty in half, Census data showed. As a parent living “paycheck to paycheck,” Izabel said the monthly payments allowed her to rely less on food pantries.

But Democrats failed to get Congress to make that level of support permanent.

Senate finance Chair Ron Wyden of Oregon, a Democrat, and Rep. Jason Smith, a Missouri Republican who leads the House Ways and Means Committee, struck the current bipartisan deal. The proposal would gradually increase the refundable limit of $1,600 per child to $2,000 by 2025 and allow parents to get the maximum benefit for each of their children. Right now, the more children in a family, the more parents have to earn to get the full credit.

For example, a single mother of two earning $15,000 a year receives $1,875 under the existing 2017 rate, but under the Wyden-Smith proposal, would receive $3,600 on her 2023 taxes and $3,750 the following year.

But Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho, the ranking Republican on the finance committee, strongly objects to a provision that would allow families to still earn the credit even if they work less. He thinks it turns the program into an entitlement program instead of one that rewards work. Wyden has offered to drop the provision.
Republican Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho, right, is the leading opponent of a bipartisan tax package that would expand benefits for families. Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, left, who chairs the finance committee struck the deal with Rep. Jason Smith, a Missouri Republican. (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

The bill needs 60 votes to overcome a filibuster and get to a floor vote. But experts say it’s unlikely Majority Leader Chuck Schumer would advance the legislation unless he’s confident it would pass. Republican Sen. Todd Young of Indiana is among those still in favor of the plan, which also includes tax incentives for businesses. But so far, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell seems to be backing Crapo’s position.

“There are easily 10 Republicans who like the bill, but [it’s] unclear if they will vote yes without leadership being on board,” said David Plasterer, a senior associate at Results, an anti-poverty nonprofit. “The hope is that businesses and constituents will be all over Senate Republicans.”

‘Economic impact’

Democrats wanted to see relief for families similar to the 2021 expansion. That’s why Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, who voted against the House bill, called it “a watered-down policy for the sake of making a deal.”

The monthly payment provision, Plasterer said, was especially important to families with school-age children, who used the funds for basic needs like food and rent, but also spent it on child care, afterschool programs and educational materials.

But there’s also an advantage to getting a bigger tax refund — especially when it comes to education, he said. The extra money can go towards buying a car, which can help alleviate some of the transportation challenges that exacerbate chronic absenteeism, particularly in rural areas, he said.

Originally from rural Indiana, where he worked with low-income fathers at a social service agency, he said the only time during the year when families had thousands of dollars available was when they received their tax refund.

“Those families are doing repairs to their car, or buying a used car,” he said. “If you don’t have a car, you can’t get to school.”
National Parents Union polls show some families, especially those with household incomes less than $50,000, struggle to pay for basic necessities. (National Parents Union, Echelon Insights)

Polling conducted by the National Parents Union shows broad support among parents from both parties for expanding the tax credit. With the pro-business benefits in the plan, like deductions for research and development, Smith said she doesn’t understand why some Republicans aren’t on board.

“When you think about the economic impact of the total package,” she said, “it should be a no brainer.”

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— Linda Jacobson is a senior writer at The 74.

https://www.the74million.org/article/final-push-to-save-expanded-child-tax-credit-as-senate-hopes-dim/

Reprinted in:

LA School Report
Rents Are Unaffordable Nationwide. A Renter’s Tax Credit Would Help.

A monthly tax credit that capped housing costs at 30 percent of income could keep millions of Americans — including me — in our homes.

By Ashley Dines

April 3, 2024

I spent my first birthday in a shelter. Decades later, after doing all I was supposed to do to lift myself up out of poverty, I’m sofa hopping with my children.

I live in Las Vegas, where I work on a program helping low-income women and children find support to keep a roof over their heads and food in their bellies. When I enrolled in the program myself, the supervisors recognized my ability to lead and offered me this job.

I love my work, and the pay is solidly above minimum wage. Given my humble beginnings, anyone would say I’m a success story. Except I’m currently homeless.

Rents are astronomically high. In Las Vegas, the average household now needs to make at least $70,000 a year to afford rent. I make a decent full-time salary — but not that much.

It’s not a problem unique to me or to Vegas. According to the Low-Income Housing Coalition, there is no state or county in the United States where someone working full-time at minimum wage can afford a modest two-bedroom apartment.

When a huge chunk of your paycheck goes to rent or the mortgage, there’s little leftover for an emergency. And most Americans — 56 percent of us — can’t pay for an unexpected emergency of $1,000. A surprise dental bill, medical bill, or car repair can send us spiraling into poverty.
That's what happened to me. My mother had to be hospitalized, I separated from my children's father, and my car broke down. I lost everything — almost literally overnight.

I first had to help my mother. She was my childcare provider, but she’s now disabled. Then my cell phone bill payments lapsed for two months, and I had to pay in full to keep my only source of communication turned on. I had to fix my car to get to work and get the kids where they needed to go. Legal bills piled up from trying to secure custody and child support.

I quickly fell behind on rent. The next thing I know, the constable was at my door — forcing me, my two kids, and my disabled mother out of the apartment and down the stairs. That proved too challenging for my mother, and I had to take her back to the hospital immediately.

Again, I work full time and make decent money. But many people are like me — we fall into the gap where our income is too high for assistance but too low for living.

Often, just a little bit of help could keep us from falling into homelessness, joblessness, or worse. If rental assistance were expanded to people making less than a housing wage, or if the pandemic-era expanded Child Tax Credit were still in place, I wouldn't have been evicted.

We need to bring that expanded Child Tax Credit back. Antipoverty organizations are also calling for a new Renter's Tax Credit.

Unlike homeowners who get a mortgage tax credit, renters don’t get any tax benefit for paying month after month. With a Renter’s Tax Credit, renters who pay more than 30 percent of our paychecks on housing would get a monthly credit to bring their housing costs down to that percentage.

That would help more of us stay in our homes, keep our jobs, and afford basics like food and child care. It could also reduce the need for more complicated safety net supports.

April is National Fair Housing Month. If we want everyone to have a fair chance to thrive, we can start now by ensuring access to stable, affordable housing.
Ashley Dines is a mother of two and an expert on poverty with RESULTS from Las Vegas, Nevada. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

https://otherwords.org/rents-are-unaffordable-nationwide-a-renters-tax-credit-would-help/

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THE GOOD MEN PROJECT
https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/rents-are-unaffordable-nationwide-a-renters-tax-credit-would-help/
Create a Bright Spot

Spring 2024

Lind Henry’s piece about life brings up the question, “What am I creating?” (“Life is What You Create,” Fall 2023). There are many bright spots in our world, but of course it is generally the negative that gets the press (3rd Act is a joyful exception). Acts of kindness and working to make a difference, while living lightly, are helping me create a bright spot within. Speaking up to those who represent me in Congress (202-224-3121) about critical legislation like renewing the expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) and the READ Act can create bright spots for millions in our country and around the world. Making this call can make a difference by cutting child poverty in half by passing the CTC and giving tens of millions the opportunity for an education in areas of the world experiencing poverty with the READ Act. Why not try taking action to create a bright spot, within you and without you?

— Willie Dickerson, Snohomish, WA

https://issuu.com/3rdactmagazine/docs/interior-spring-2024?fr=sMTMxNDY0NDEwMjM
Imagine losing everything you had. Your stability, your privacy, and in many cases basic respect from others. In 2023, over 653,000 individuals (about half the population of Hawaii) in the U.S. experienced homelessness.

Homelessness is defined as a condition where an individual or family lacks a fixed, regular, nighttime residence. The reality of being homeless means sharing a crowded space with strangers and conforming to the rules of a shelter. If you aren't lucky enough to get into the limited shelter space, then you are left to make your way on the street. I have met people living under bridges, encampments in the woods, sewer crates, tents, park benches, and everything in between.

Homelessness is a complex and pervasive issue — affecting individuals in all walks of life. There's an outdated belief that those experiencing homelessness are lazy or don't want to work. Yet studies show that over 50 percent of people living in shelters and 40 percent of unsheltered people are employed either part-time or full-time. More than half of the people I've worked with who were homeless were employed full-time or had a steady income. But it still wasn't enough for them to survive.

There is a trend in our country right now to punish those experiencing homelessness, with multiple states working to “outlaw homelessness”. Florida lawmakers passed a bill that will ban homeless individuals from camping or sleeping on public property. Wisconsin tried passing a similar bill that would make it illegal for individuals to sleep anywhere but on designated camping areas without getting fined. These pointless fines and the criminalization of homelessness will lead to unpaid tickets, open warrants, overcrowding in our jails, and more barriers to finding stability later. If individuals don't have access to housing, can't get into shelters, and now can't sleep outdoors, where are they supposed to go? By June 30, the Supreme Court will decide if states can continue passing laws like these which will have major implications for the future.
We need to address the real problems that contribute to homelessness in our country — the lack of resources and economic systems that are holding people back.

The primary contributor to homelessness is pretty obvious — the lack of affordable housing. Many struggle to find housing that fits within their monthly budget and with housing costs soaring it makes so many vulnerable to homelessness. In 2021, there were almost 10 million households paying over 30 percent of their income on rent and over 11 million households paying over 50 percent of their income on rent. All these households are forced to decide daily which of their bills to pay. The balance between rent and food is one the underprivileged know well. Out of all those that qualify for housing assistance, only one in four receive it.

Another contributing factor is economic instability. Low wages, job loss, and social safety nets that don't support enough. Seventy-six percent of Americans live paycheck to paycheck. Some face difficulties in maintaining employment due to mental health, substance abuse, or lack of education and skills. The average income paid by a single full-time job is not enough to keep up with monthly expenses. These challenges make it difficult for so many to secure and maintain housing.

Right now, the resources and laws in the U.S. are not working to meet our basic needs and human rights. We need more affordable housing and living wages. The only way to make that happen is coming together as a community, demanding action and change. This is what we do at RESULTS every day.

Editor's note: Kali Daugherty is a mother, advocate, and RESULTS Expert on Poverty from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This article first was published on RESULTS’ blog and is cross-posted with permission.

Lawmakers Should Spend a Night in a Homeless Shelter

*Maybe then they’d drop their opposition to even modest tax credits for low-income people like the ones I work with.*

**By Tiffany Tagbo**

April 17, 2024

If there’s one thing I could tell lawmakers, it would be to bring back the expanded, monthly, fully refundable Child Tax Credit.

Those monthly payments of up to $300 per child cut child poverty nearly in half in just a few months. And when the credit expired in late 2021, child poverty immediately shot back up. So we know it works.

Lawmakers are now considering a more modest expansion. It doesn’t go far enough, but it could lift another 400,000 kids out of poverty — children like the ones I worked with.

I grew up walking the fine line of having something and nothing all at the same time. I’ve experienced tumultuous times as an adult, and I’ve worked with people experiencing poverty and homelessness. I can tell lawmakers firsthand no matter which side of the coin families end up on, legislation and programs such as the Child Tax Credit, SNAP, WIC, and other safety net programs make a difference.

When I was growing up, my mother worked several minimum-wage jobs and relied on social programs to fill the gaps left by low wages. As a result, my siblings and I never had to sleep on the streets, go to school hungry, or wear tattered clothing like many children do.

With that help, I went on to graduate from the University of Central Oklahoma with a bachelor’s degree. Eventually, I became a Child Welfare Investigator at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services following up on claims of neglect and abuse.
While I saw some of both, many of these cases were simply the conditions of poverty. Many caseworkers had never experienced poverty and couldn’t make the distinction, but I could. Unfortunately, poverty landed many children in the child welfare system.

With decent pay and benefits, I was able to buy a house. But the work was soul-crushing and I eventually burned out.

You do everything right, and still — boom! You’re knocked right down. One day you are employed with a good salary and benefits, the next you are unemployed without the means to afford the basics, even with a college degree. Married, pregnant, and unable to find decent work, I relied on SNAP and Medicaid to get by — barely.

My job changed, but the clients I work with haven’t.

Poverty puts them in impossible situations. They must choose between food or shelter, medical care or poor health, running water or electricity. It’s a vicious cycle of suffering.

Without a fixed address or help navigating the system, families can’t always access assistance programs that would help them.

If my clients had the expanded monthly Child Tax Credit, many could have afforded housing, clothing, and food — and escaped the cruel cycle of poverty. In his recent budget proposal, President Biden called on Congress to restore the expanded, pandemic-era Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit that lifted tens of millions out of poverty in 2021.

A newer bipartisan tax proposal before the Senate would help. It would modestly expand the Child Tax Credit, lifting 400,000 kids out of poverty and helping 16 million overall.

The bill passed the House with an overwhelming bipartisan majority but has stalled in the Senate, where some senators are blocking it for political gain. Families deserve better. The time for delay is over. The Senate needs to vote.

I challenge lawmakers to live on the $6 a day that SNAP recipients do, or to come and spend just one night in a shelter. Once they experience these hardships, they’ll restore the expanded Child Tax Credit faster than they can say “expand it.” Perhaps this should be a requirement of the job.
We must make our voices heard and speak for those who are silenced and often left out of policy discussion. We must restore the Child Tax Credit expansion and ensure the thriving of all children.

*Tiffany Tagbo is a mother of two from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and an Expert on Poverty with RESULTS. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*

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I Run a Food Pantry But It’s Not Enough. We Need Funding for SNAP.

I’m proud to help my neighbors. But food donations are no substitute for government nutrition programs like SNAP, which is now under threat.

By Carla Ventura

May 8, 2024

I run a food pantry. I’m proud of the work we do. But if lawmakers passed a liveable minimum wage or invested more in programs like SNAP, people wouldn’t need to rely on pantries like mine.

Pantries are a critical piece of the anti-hunger puzzle, but they’re filler pieces. Government nutrition programs — with the infrastructure and funding to get the job done — should be the centerpiece.

I grew up on food stamps, called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. My mother worked hard, but her wages were too low to meet our basic needs. Sometimes we felt embarrassed pulling out the stamps at the register — I worried kids would talk about me at school.

But the aid was a blessing. It helped keep us from hunger. Even still, food stamps weren’t designed to last the whole month. Most months, we had to travel long distances — often outside our county — to find food pantries so we could get by.

SNAP is the nation’s most effective anti-hunger program, feeding nearly a quarter of all U.S. children. The program reduces hunger by about 30 percent, improves long-term educational, health, and economic outcomes for children, and helps address systemic racial disparities in poverty.

SNAP is the first line of defense in a down economy. In fact, food insecurity fell to a record low of 10.2 percent in 2021 — in the middle of the pandemic — due to the pandemic-era boost in SNAP benefits. But now that those benefits have expired, nearly 13 percent of us experience food insecurity.
For many Americans, wages are simply too low. To meet basic needs in South Carolina, where I live, two adults with two children must earn over $21 per hour. But our state minimum wage is just $7.25.

A person would have to work 106 hours a week at that wage to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment here. Actually, the minimum wage isn’t enough to cover the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the country.

Over 44 million Americans rely on SNAP to combat hunger. Yet some members of Congress are proposing cutting the program by a whopping $30 billion over the coming decade. South Carolina alone, which is among the top 10 states with the greatest food insecurity, would suffer $400 million in cuts.

That would be devastating for families like mine.

I’m a single mother with three kids. At age three, one of my sons was diagnosed with autism, and I couldn’t find affordable daycare that could accommodate his needs. Every week, I had to leave work at a moment’s notice to help him or rush him home. I couldn’t sustain employment. I needed help during that challenging time, and SNAP provided it.

I now run a food pantry, Food for All, where I’ve seen that I’m far from alone.

I listen to the stories of people who come here and share my own to ease their feelings of embarrassment. I breathe a sigh of relief with them when they tell me, “Now I can afford my medication,” “Now I can make rent,” or “Now I don't have to choose between feeding my child and getting her new shoes.”

But other times, I have to watch those who’ve waited in long lines for an hour be turned away because the food has run out. I can't possibly get enough food donations to meet the enormous need.

But I won’t give up. None of us can.

That’s why I continue to fight for robust funding — and against the proposed slashing — of SNAP. People shouldn’t have to rely on food pantries to feed themselves or their families.
We know what works. We saw how hunger decreased during the pandemic when it had been forecast to skyrocket because we invested in the well-being of families. We must do that again.

*Carla Ventura is a mother, founder of the nonprofit Food for All, and an Expert on Poverty with RESULTS from Columbia, South Carolina. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.*

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If lawmakers slash the social safety net any further, millions of stories like mine won't be possible.

By Sharvonne A. Walker

May 29, 2024

Life is unpredictable. And sometimes, no matter how hard you work, life throws curve balls that hit you in the gut.

That's what our tax dollars are supposed to be for — a helping hand when we're most in need. More than once in my life, the social safety net came through for my family. And thanks to that help, we're able to give back today.

My mother worked hard as a carpenter and educator for most of the years I was growing up. But her income just wasn't enough to pay for rent, food, childcare, and other basic needs.

Thankfully, she kept us fed with WIC (the Women, Infants, and Children nutrition assistance program), SNAP (then called “food stamps”), and frequent visits to food pantries. And after living in a shelter for the first three years of my life, we were able to get Section 8 housing.

But life continued to throw curve balls.

My mom suffered a stroke while pregnant with my brother, who was born prematurely in 2002. She had to relearn how to walk and talk — and my brother needed serious health interventions due to complications of his premature birth. Thankfully, we got some help from Social Security and Medicare.

All of these supports enabled me to get an education, get into college, and help my family.
When my mother’s health failed to the point that she was on dialysis, my 10-year-old little brother needed to be cared for. So I moved him halfway across the country to live with me. Suddenly, I was a student, a worker, and a young single caretaker.

My mother recently passed away. But thanks to her hard work and the help we got from public programs, I was able to get a master’s degree. After experiencing the vital importance of those programs, I knew I had to devote my life to helping others access the same assistance that had been life-saving for me and my family.

I now work at an organization in Indianapolis, where I help residents achieve their family goals through basic needs support, community engagement, and case management. Ultimately, we explore the barriers keeping families from economic stability and work with them to find solutions.

My little brother, meanwhile, is 21 and a trade school graduate. He’s gainfully employed as an aircraft cleaner at the local airport and a production associate at a manufacturing company. I’m so proud of all that we’ve been able to accomplish because help was there for us when we needed it.

Yet even as I tell my story, there are lawmakers who would cut affordable housing and rental assistance programs. They would slash nutrition programs and Medicaid. There are even lawmakers and cities who seek to criminalize homelessness, which has now gotten the attention of the Supreme Court.

The deep cuts to social programs the House majority has proposed would slash investments that are already insufficient. Due to the lack of affordable housing in this country, only one in four eligible families actually receive housing vouchers like my family relied on. These cuts would make it even harder.

Thanks to the help we got, we give back as good as we received and more — that’s how a healthy system works. If we help families survive rocky times rather than fall deeper into poverty, all of us benefit as a society. If we don’t, then millions of stories like mine won’t be possible.

Imagine what our nation would look like if we fully invested in the programs most of us need at one time or another rather than constantly fighting to keep the little we have. We shouldn’t be cutting our public programs — we should be expanding them.
Sharvonne Walker is a wife, guardian, and community builder from Indianapolis who advocates for economic justice. She volunteers with the antipoverty organization RESULTS. This op-ed was distributed by OtherWords.org.

https://otherwords.org/i-got-help-now-i-give-back-thats-how-a-healthy-society-should-work/

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