



Why the White House Needs a Child and Family Policy Council

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American families need help. Years of **disinvestment** and the pandemic have compounded stressors for families and those responsible for their education and care. Fortunately for families, President Biden's **American Families Plan** proposes **much-needed** economic assistance, child care, early childhood education, paid leave, and more. To advance the needs of children and families in current and future federal policies, the president should create America's first Child and Family Policy Council.

How Public Policy Affects Families

Public policy affects every aspect of family life, including **family creation, partnership support, economic security, childrearing, caregiving**, and family safety. For example, policy shapes access to and eligibility for legal recognition as a family (e.g., adoption, same-gender marriage, immigration status), financial assistance, (paid) leave to care for a newborn, protections in cases of abuse, and care and education for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Investing in families' basic needs, such as healthcare, food, housing, education, transportation, wages, and workplace supports (e.g., flexible work, predictable scheduling) helps families thrive and provides an essential foundation for economic growth.

Designing Public Policy to Meet Families' Needs

Despite the many ways that policies (or their absence) affect families' lives, there is no centralized entity in the White House to coordinate the range of **fragmented policies across federal agencies** and levels of government. At the Federal level, the Department of Health and Human Services manages early learning and cash assistance, the Department of Agriculture manages food assistance, the Department of Housing and Urban Development manages affordable housing, and the Department of the Treasury manages tax credits. Federal agencies set their own eligibility parameters, within which state and local governments adapt further, creating a complex patchwork of policies, **administrative burden**, and **benefit cliffs** for families to navigate. Like "Children's Cabinets," which **align people, data, evidence, and money** around children's issues at the state and local levels, and the federal **Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs**, the Child and Family Policy Council would take a whole of government approach. Specifically, the council would facilitate the development of **government-wide goals, data and cost sharing across agencies, and identification of gaps or duplications** across systems. By aligning goals, data, and measures for success, the council can examine performance across policies and programs and recommend investments in efforts that most effectively serve children and families.

In partnership with agency leaders, the Child and Family Policy Council would develop a federal strategy for a coordinated, multigenerational, and equity-centered ecosystem of policies and programs. "Multigenerational" or "**two generation**" approaches involve designing systems that integrate the needs of the whole family and promote positive health, education, and economic outcomes that strengthen the intergenerational well-being of **adults and children** (e.g., joint health screenings). Further, the council would evaluate policies and rules for direct and indirect impacts on families and ensure equity across various identities, including: race, ethnicity, religion, income, geography, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, citizenship status, justice system involvement, and family structure (e.g., single parent, grandparent, adoptive, blended families). For example, systems for distributing tax credits and child benefits must be accessible to families headed by grandparents or other caregivers, with options to split tax credits between parents and caregivers who share custody.

Investing in Families is Investing in America's Future

Families need public policies that alleviate stressors and prioritize their well-being, not only as current and future workers fueling economic growth, but also as humans in pursuit of happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives. The Child and Family Policy Council would demonstrate the Biden Administration's commitment to promoting family well-being as a worthwhile goal and create opportunities to integrate evidence and expertise from family, developmental, implementation, and other sciences into policy planning. For example, beyond the economic case for paid leave as a strategy to increase women's labor force participation, paid leave also supports **parent and child health** and the **establishment of secure parent-child relationships**, which are critical for optimizing child development outcomes. This council would complement the expertise of the White House's long-standing councils on the economy, environment, national security, environment, domestic policy, and the recently **reinstated gender council**. Focusing on child and family functioning may also generate new policy ideas or stimulate new ways of thinking about policy. For example, the council might shift the policy default from separating families to keeping them safe and together in cases where family members cannot afford bail for non-violent offenses, face eviction because of a **rule change**, or lack a visa. Policies have enormous potential to alleviate stress and hardship, support children's and adults' development and relationships, and create thriving communities that fuel economic growth.

President Biden is answering families' cries for help. While America waits for the future of the American Families Plan to unfold in Congress, we can leverage the Child and Family Policy Council to elevate families' voices at the highest levels of government; engage with a diverse range of families, scientists, local and state governments, and child- and family-serving organizations; and create a federal government that is more equitable, efficient, and responsive to families' needs.

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