

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 20, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

President Biden and Secretary Becerra,

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect our lives, we urge you to prioritize the needs of children who have lost parents and caregivers to this disease. As Members of Congress, we are concerned that these bereaved children are not receiving support, both specialized mental health counseling as well as financial assistance, in order to recover from the trauma of losing a loved one.

According to a recent report released by the COVID Collaborative, there are an estimated 167,000 children, or roughly one in 450 of all children in the United States, who have lost a parent or in-home caregiver to COVID-19, with more than 13,000 children losing their only in-home caregiver. Children of color are feeling these deaths significantly more than White children. American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander children lost caregivers at a rate of nearly 4 times that of White children, while Black and Hispanic children were nearly 2.5 times the rate of White children. Moreover, seventy percent of caregiver loss affected children aged 13 and younger.¹

Children who have lost a parent or in-home caregiver are faced with both the grief of losing a loved one along with financial hardship. Research suggests that bereaved children have a higher risk of lower educational attainment, economic insecurity, early death, substance abuse, and mental health problems.^{2,3,4}

We are pleased that your administration continues to emphasize the need to support children through this pandemic. Earlier this year, your administration provided \$74.2 million in grants to strengthen youth mental health through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

¹ Treglia, D., Cutuli, J. J., Arasteh, K., J. Bridgeland, J.M., Edson, G., Phillips, S., Balakrishna, A. (2021). Hidden Pain: Children Who Lost a Parent or Caregiver to COVID-19 and What the Nation Can Do to Help Them. COVID Collaborative.

² Hamdan S, Mazariegos D, Melhem NM, et al. (2012). Effect of parental bereavement on health risk behaviors in youth: a 3-year follow-up. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med 2012;166:216–23. 10.1001/archpediatrics.2011.682

³ William Feigelman, Zohn Rosen, Thomas Joiner, Caroline Silva & Anna S. Mueller (2017) Examining longer-term effects of parental death in adolescents and young adults: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent to Adult Health, Death Studies, 41:3, 133-143, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2016.1226990](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2016.1226990)

⁴ Azuike, P., Anjoyeb, M., & King, L., Azuike, P., Anjoyeb, M. & King, L. Bereavement and children's mental health: Recognising the effects of early parental loss. Nurs. Child. Young People 33, (2021).

Administration in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also applaud your efforts to support families through financial assistance such as launching a program to help pay funeral costs through FEMA. Most importantly, we strongly supported the expansion and increase of the Child Tax Credit.

However, we believe it is critical to address the growing number of children who are experiencing traumatic loss and ensure that resources are available to them to both cope with the loss of a caregiver and fulfill their basic needs. Because of this, we request a response on the following questions:

- What resources and financial support is the Administration currently providing to children who have lost a parent or caregiver due to COVID-19?
- Are any funds from previous COVID stimulus packages being dedicated towards supporting bereaved children? If so, what type of support are they receiving?
- Are there federal assistance programs available to support low-income families who may have lost their primary-income provider and caregiver due to COVID-19? What barriers currently exist for families to access these programs?
- What steps is your administration taking or planning to take to better identify bereaved children and ensure they and their families have timely access to federal resources and assistance?

Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
KAREN BASS
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
ANDRÉ CARSON
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
DANNY K. DAVIS
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
DWIGHT EVANS
Member of Congress



AYANNA PRESSLEY
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
JAMAAL BOWMAN, Ed. D
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
YVETTE D. CLARKE
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
MADELEINE DEAN
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
SHEILA JACKSON LEE
Member of Congress

_____/s/
SARA JACOBS
Member of Congress

_____/s/
DEREK KILMER
Member of Congress

_____/s/
BARBARA LEE
Member of Congress

_____/s/
GRACE MENG
Member of Congress

_____/s/
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
Member of Congress

_____/s/
DONALD M. PAYNE, JR.
Member of Congress

_____/s/
RITCHIE TORRES
Member of Congress

_____/s/
RO KHANNA
Member of Congress

_____/s/
JOHN B. LARSON
Member of Congress

_____/s/
JAMES P. MCGOVERN
Member of Congress

_____/s/
GRACE F. NAPOLITANO
Member of Congress

_____/s/
ILHAN OMAR
Member of Congress

_____/s/
NORMA TORRES
Member of Congress