

Tools for Action: Budget Reconciliation

Toolkit Overview and Navigation

Policymakers in Congress are currently considering fast-track budget reconciliation legislation that could make critical cuts to key programs children and families rely on, including Medicaid, TANF, SNAP, and SSBG.

As a network dedicated to preventing child abuse and neglect, we have an important role in raising awareness with policymakers and partners about what is needed to support and strengthen children and families – **our voices are critical.**

To support efforts to raise awareness with key decision-makers, we have prepared a comprehensive toolkit of resources on what's happening, what's at stake, and how you and your networks can easily take action and influence change.

Feel free to reach out with any questions to Elizabeth Solhtalab (esolhtalab@preventchildabuse.org) or Kelly Crane (kcrane@preventchildabuse.org). For questions related to Healthy Families America, reach out to Melea Rose-Waters (mrosewaters@preventchildabuse.org). Thank you for your partnership and advocacy for children and families!

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**This resource has been adapted from materials developed by the [National Coalition for Child and Family Well-Being](#)*

What Is Budget Reconciliation? Why Does it Matter for Children and Families?

Congress is currently considering budget reconciliation legislation that could make critical cuts to key programs children and families rely on, including Medicaid.

To support your advocacy about the role these programs play in supporting children and families, this overview offers context on what's at stake.

What is Budget Reconciliation?

A fast-track legislative process for bills that impacts taxes and spending. Unlike most major legislation, reconciliation bills can pass with simple majorities in both chambers of Congress.

How Does it Work?

Congressional Budget Committees, in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, prepare a Budget Resolution, a blueprint for a budget that outlines tax and spending policy. The Budget Resolution sets “targets” for spending and revenue, and instructs authorizing committees to legislate changes to achieve those targets.

Reconciliation starts with the House and Senate budget committees and expands to include nearly all committees. The package, named the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*, passed the House on May 22, 2025, in H.R. 1, moving next to the Senate where they will create a legislative budget package of their own. This is why it's incredibly important for the Senate to hear from you.

Why is Congress Using Reconciliation Now?

While the 2024 elections brought unified control of all branches of the federal government, the majorities rest on thin margins.

Major tax policies from 2017 expire at the end of this year. The Administration wants to make further tax policy reforms based on campaign promises, and spending cuts to pay for them.

How Does that Affect Children and Families?

Reconciliation typically requires tax and spending changes to balance each other; more spending requires more revenue and vice versa.

This year, Congress is looking to key programs for children and families as a way to advance at least \$1.5 trillion in spending cuts over 10 years.

What Programs are at Risk?

Based on the budget blueprints moving through Congress:

- *Medicaid: Medicaid provides health coverage to many low-income households.*
- *Social Services Block Grant: SSBG aims to help people achieve self-sufficiency and prevent abuse and neglect.*
- *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: TANF provides states with flexible funding to support various programs aimed at reducing poverty and promoting self-sufficiency.*
- *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: SNAP assists over 42 million Americans, providing critical nutrition support.*

Are These Cuts a Done Deal?

No! The risk is real, but this is a winnable issue if constituents and nonpartisan advocates for children and families can educate policymakers about why these programs matter.

What Can I Do?

Help send a message to decision makers in Congress that cuts to these programs will have harmful impacts on children and families in your state. You can do that through **direct outreach** to your Congressional delegation, generating **media coverage** in your local news outlets, and **bringing community members**—such as business leaders, faith communities, and others—along to help make the case.

- **Send an email** to your members of Congress to share your perspective and offer to be a resource.
- Post on **social media** (tag your Legislators!).
- **Call** your Congressional offices to share your concerns.

- **Request a meeting** with your members of Congress at their state offices at home or their Congressional offices in D.C.
- **Pitch stories** to local media and submit op-eds and letters-to-the-editor to your local papers.
- Develop a state **sign-on letter** to your delegation using the template below.

Please reach out to the [Policy Team](#) at Prevent Child Abuse America for any support in reaching out to your Senators.

Engaging Partners in Action

If you have partners, board members, or even community members who would be willing to engage in outreach on reconciliation, this offers you the background and context to use in outreach to encourage them to engage in action. Feel free to customize to highlight your focus!

Sample Language

Thank you for your continued commitment to children and families. **I am writing today to highlight an important and timely federal child well-being advocacy opportunity for you.**

Right now, Congress is considering budget legislation that could make critical cuts to key programs children and families rely on, including Medicaid.

To support your ability to take action today to raise awareness about the role these programs play supporting children and families, this overview offers context on what's at stake.

Prevent Child Abuse America is one of the nearly 450 organizations that have joined a [letter](#) highlighting the role of Medicaid, the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in strengthening families who are in or at-risk of entering the child welfare system.

[INSERT YOUR ORGANIZATIONS' PERSPECTIVE/PRIORITIES].

As Congress considers fast-track legislation that could cut these critical programs, they need to hear about why these programs matter for families in your community. **[INSERT**

ANY UNIQUE PRIORITIES YOU WOULD LIKE TO ELEVATE TO YOUR FIELD OR PARTNERS].

Included below are resources for you to reach out to your Congressional delegation. If you don't know your Members of Congress, you can find out by clicking [here](#).

Thanks for your continued partnership for children and families!

Sincerely,

X

Sample Sign-On Letter

Sign-on letters demonstrate broad support for or opposition to an issue, influencing policy decisions, and educating legislators about a specific topic. They allow individuals and organizations to amplify their voices and collective impact on advocacy efforts.

Below is a sample sign-on letter you can tailor and use to collect signatures from advocacy groups, community leaders, faith communities, businesses, and others to demonstrate support within your state for preserving Medicaid and other safety net programs in the budget reconciliation process.

Sample Content

Dear [State] Delegation]:

We, the undersigned [State] residents, are constituents and stakeholders in [State's] child and family-serving system. We represent children, families, service providers, and community and faith-based organizations across [State], and we thank you for your service in Congress.

We write today to share information about some of [State's] most vulnerable children and families and the vital role Medicaid and other federal programs play to keep them safe, healthy, and whole. We hope you take this information into account as you consider federal investments in these programs.

- **Medicaid** provides health care coverage for more than ____ State residents, ____% of whom are age 21 or younger.¹
 - Medicaid ensures access to healthcare for low-income children, including routine check-ups, immunizations, and other preventative care.
 - Medicaid coverage keeps kids out of the child welfare system and keeps parents and children together. This is about much more than visits to the doctor. Medicaid provides coverage for the services that support parents, stabilize families and make it possible for children to stay at home.
 - Medicaid can be particularly important for children living in rural communities; a recent report estimated that nearly __% of children in State's rural and small towns counties are covered by Medicaid.²
 - *Option to include Medicaid's coverage of home visiting or other vital services.*
- **Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)** funding helps communities meet a range of needs for children and adults.
 - Here in State, SSBG is combined with state, local, and other funds to provide [include here examples of services provided through SSBG].³
 - Our state legislature anticipated over \$_____ in federal SSBG funds for services in State for FY 25, and estimated that those services would reach nearly _____ recipients, most of whom are children.
- **Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)** provides cash assistance to families at the lowest income levels and can be essential to keeping children at home or with relatives.
 - TANF helps cover basic needs like food, shelter, and utilities. TANF also aims to promote self-sufficiency by encouraging job preparation, work, and marriage.
 - Research has shown that greater access to TANF reduces foster care placements and that limiting the benefits available under TANF is linked with more child maltreatment.⁴

¹ <https://www.kff.org/interactive/medicaid-state-fact-sheets/>

² Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy [Medicaid's Role in Small Towns and Rural Areas](#) Appendix Table 1

³ https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ocs/RPT_SSBG_FY-2022-Annual-Report_Final_508.pdf

⁴ Chapin Hall, [The Role of TANF in Economic Stability and Family Well-Being and Child Safety](#)

- o State receives about \$_____ each year to run its TANF programs, providing services including _____.⁵
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** helps State residents feed themselves and their families.
 - o More than ____ State residents participate in SNAP, with nearly \$___ per month (on average) flowing into the state and being spent in local economies.⁶
 - o State's children need healthy and ample food to grow into healthy adults and easing the burden of paying for meals can help families who may be struggling to pay for essentials of life.
 - o For relatives taking care of children when their parents cannot, this additional support can be critical. Research also has shown that more generous state SNAP policies are linked with less maltreatment of children and fewer foster care placements—even in the face of the opioid epidemic and other challenges.⁷

Cuts to these crucial programs would not only end critical programs families rely on, it threatens the health and well-being of countless families. In addition, the economic stability and well-being that comes with having reliable health coverage and other supports provided by Medicaid and other programs helps prevent families from costly downstream system interventions, such as child welfare system involvement.

State's child and family support systems are already challenged to provide appropriate resources to everyone who needs them. Cuts to Medicaid and other key programs will slash budgets for prevention and state child welfare agencies, forcing State's taxpayers to make up the difference.

We respectfully urge you to consider the vital role of these federal investments for State residents. We stand ready to partner with you to highlight the importance of these funds in keeping State children and families healthy and strong. If you need additional information please contact Name, Email Address, and Phone Number.

⁵

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/income-security/state-fact-sheets-how-states-spend-funds-under-the-tanf-block-grant>

⁶ <https://frac.org/research/resource-library/snap-state-fact-sheets>

⁷ Johnson-Motoyama, M. et. al *Association Between State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Policies, Child Protective Services Involvement, and Foster Care in the US, 2004-2016*, JAMA Netw Open

- [SIGNING ORGS]

Contacting Your Member of Congress

Action Alert

You can use our [Policy Action Center](#) to easily reach out to your legislators. These pre-populated messages, with the ability for edits, make it easy to for you or partners to call attention to the proposed cuts and urge your Senator to protect program funding for vital programs that millions of Americans depend on every day.

In addition, the following are sample email and phone scripts for you to use in any direct outreach.

Sample Email

Hello and I hope you are doing well. I am a constituent in **[your town/state]** writing to ask **[Senator/Representative XX]** to maintain Medicaid and other programs supporting strong families in our community.

As Congress considers possible changes to health and human services programs this year through budget reconciliation, I want to share with you the role of these programs in protecting children, youth, and families.

Some of our most vulnerable children are at risk from cuts to Medicaid. Virtually every child in foster care is covered by Medicaid, including infants, toddlers, and older youth. Medicaid's comprehensive coverage keeps kids safe and healthy and keeps families whole and stable.

Medicaid plays a vital role in ensuring the health and well-being of millions of families and children across the United States. As the largest source of health coverage for low-income Americans, Medicaid provides essential access to medical, behavioral, and preventive care that many families would otherwise be unable to afford. For children, this means regular check-ups, immunizations, and early treatment for health issues that can impact development, learning, and long-term well-being.

For families, Medicaid offers a critical safety net during times of financial hardship, job loss, or medical emergencies. It reduces the burden of healthcare costs and supports parents in caring for their children without having to choose between health and other basic needs. Additionally, Medicaid supports services for children with special health care needs and developmental disabilities, helping families access therapies, medications, and support systems that foster greater independence and quality of life.

By strengthening the health of our nation's children and stabilizing families, Medicaid contributes to healthier communities and a stronger future. Preserving this essential program is not just a matter of policy—it is critical for the children and families in **State**.

[Senator/Representative XX] has been a champion for children and families. We are counting on **[him/her]** to keep kids safe and keep families whole in this budget process.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please feel free to reach out if you would like to hear more about why we must preserve Medicaid if we want to protect our children.

Sample Congressional Call Script

You can call your Senators to let their staff know about your perspective on why it's critical to keep Medicaid strong.

You can find the phone numbers for your Members [here](#), or you can call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be connected to their office.

Before Calling

- Have your personal information ready (name, address, voting district)
- Have 1-2 examples of how Medicaid, or other social service programs, supports children and families in your community

You can use and adapt this brief script:

- Hello, my name is **[X]** and I am a constituent from **[YOUR TOWN]**
- I am calling today to ask the Senator to keep Medicaid and other important programs strong for children and families when considering the reconciliation bill.
- We need to preserve Medicaid if we want to protect kids in our community.

- Medicaid keeps kids safe and healthy and keeps families stable and whole.
- **[Share State Specific Data/Information].**
- **[INSERT PERSONAL REFLECTION OR CONNECTION TO THE ISSUE HERE].**
- As Congress considers possible changes through budget reconciliation, I want to make sure your boss knows about the key role these programs play in our state.
- Thank you and have a great day!

Sample District or D.C. Meeting Request

Email Template

Hello and I hope you are doing well. I am writing to request a meeting with **[Sen. XX]** to talk about Medicaid's role protecting children in our community.

As Congress considers possible changes to Medicaid and other programs through budget reconciliation, I would like to share a perspective on the role Medicaid plays in supporting [prevention/children and families] in our state.

I welcome the opportunity to meet with **[Sen. XX]** or a member of either the district office staff or the D.C. office staff to share more about how Medicaid keeps children healthy and safe and keeps families stable and whole. I've included my upcoming availability below to find a mutually convenient time for us.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Available Times to Meet

Dates, Times

Sincerely,

District Meeting Guidance

- Requests for meetings should be sent the week before the meeting, no more than two weeks before.

- Expect a brief, cordial meeting.
- It is typical to meet with staff rather than the Members of Congress themselves.
- The staff are often the ones writing the policy details, and are a key relationship to build.
- A meeting may be 5, 10, 15, or 30 minutes.
- You may meet in a plush office or a crowded hallway. For D.C. office meetings, you may request a virtual meeting. The meeting location and duration are not a reflection of the topic's importance or your meeting's effectiveness.
- Sample meeting agenda approach
 - Open with greetings, getting to know the staff person's connection to the state/district, and exploration of common interests/priorities/values
 - Highlight the Member's connection to child and family issues as appropriate, e.g.:
 - "I know [SEN. X] has long been a champion for children and families. We are grateful for the leadership on [ISSUE Y] Now we need your help to keep kids safe and keep families whole in this budget process.
 - Explain clearly why you are there:
 - "I am here today because as a constituent, I want to share why it's critical to preserve Medicaid and other key programs if we want to support kids in our community.
 - Highlight impacts on your community of focus (e.g. home visiting, access to care, older youth, kinship families, etc.)
 - Share relevant state data and "frontline" perspectives that can humanize the issue, including connecting it to any recent state policy reforms.
 - Connect the focus to the current legislative environment:
 - "I know Congress is considering changes to these programs this year. I am here to be sure you have this information for those discussions."
 - Ask about their boss' perspective:
 - "I would love to hear about how your boss is considering these issues this year. Is there anything you are able to share?"
 - Be a resource to them and feel free to offer PCA America as a resource:
 - "What else can I provide you with today? How else can I be helpful as this work continues?"
 - Follow up!
 - Thank them for their time, and send an email later that day thanking them for the meeting and reiterating you key points.
 - Check back in a few weeks.

- o The PCA America policy staff are happy to assist with scheduling, identifying the best staff to talk to, helping talk through what to expect and can also attend any meetings if support would be helpful.

Message Guide and Talking Points

Message Strategy

Our advocacy strategy for this budget reconciliation fight is squarely focused on a specific set of decision makers, and our messaging strategy follows suit. The messaging below aims to advocate for preserving Medicaid to protect children and families involved in the child welfare system using **simple, values-based language** that will resonate with the audience we are speaking to.

Target Audience

This toolkit can support policymaker engagement in all states, which is important for ensuring comprehensive engagement. The decision makers we are especially focused on for the reconciliation debate over Medicaid cuts are influential members of the Senate from: **CA, FL, IA, NE, AR, NY, OH, OK, PA, TX, UT, and WV**. These states in particular are ones where prevention and child welfare advocates are powerful messengers.

Tapping Into Shared Values

All good messaging is rooted in values. *Effective* messaging is rooted in shared values - in other words, the common ground between you and the decision maker you are communicating with. To compel our target audience to protect Medicaid, we need to establish the things **they and we both care about** and ensure our messaging reinforces these ideas.

Our messaging on protecting Medicaid through the reconciliation process taps into the following shared values:

- Keeping families intact
- Promoting self-reliance and economic mobility for parents and families
- Putting older youth on a path to independence and productivity
- Ensuring child safety and well-being

- Avoiding cuts that are extremely harmful and politically indefensible

Navigating Messaging Challenges

While we seek to establish common ground with our target audience, we know there are key points on which we disagree that will be an impediment to getting our decision makers to ‘yes.’ We cannot ignore our audiences strongly held beliefs, even if we believe they are wrong or misguided. **Effective messaging confronts the audience’s barriers without repeating them.**

In other words, our message must address the doubts, hesitations, or concerns that our decision makers hold, but without directly naming them in a way that only seeks to reinforce them. (This is the difference between saying, “You might think insurance is expensive, but it’s not,” and “Insurance is more affordable than you may realize.”)

We see the following challenges as the most important to navigate and address through our messaging:

- Lawmakers’ concerns about waste, fraud, and abuse within the program
- Widespread misperceptions and stereotypes about Medicaid users that could lead lawmakers to assume their constituents and priority groups (e.g. children, seniors, etc.) won’t be impacted
- Fundamental ideological opposition among conservatives to welfare/social safety net programs
- The idea that cuts to Medicaid are inevitable given the size of the program relative to the size of cuts being demanded by party leaders
- Proposals for carve-outs and policy reforms (e.g. work requirements) as a viable alternative to sweeping cuts

Additional Messaging Considerations

- Spokespeople should refer to the [relevant state Medicaid program by name](#) as appropriate. I.e., use ‘Medi-Cal’ when talking with California legislators rather than ‘Medicaid.’

Talking Points

Please use these as appropriate for the scope of your work and the needs in your community.

You have been a champion for kids and families in our state. Now we need your help to keep kids safe and keep families whole in this budget process.

Here's why we need to preserve Medicaid if we want to protect kids:

Medicaid is prevention.

- Healthy children are the cornerstone of a great nation.
- Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) represent vital investments in the development, long-term health, educational attainment, and future prosperity of children.
- Together, Medicaid and CHIP provide comprehensive health coverage to more than 37 million children.
- Medicaid/CHIP cover over 40% of births nationally, providing essential prenatal care for a healthy start in life.
- Medicaid and CHIP are particularly critical for children living in rural, frontier, and underserved communities, where over 40% of children depend on these programs for their health care coverage.
- The far-reaching benefits of investing in Medicaid and CHIP extend well beyond immediate health care needs. Research has consistently demonstrated that children who are covered by these programs experience better health outcomes in adulthood, achieve higher levels of school attendance, and demonstrate greater academic success.

Medicaid keeps kids safe.

- We know when children have health coverage, they're less likely to experience physical abuse.
- It's essential that Medicaid coverage is continuous and accessible—even a brief interruption in health coverage can be extremely disruptive and even dangerous.
- Children covered by Medicaid are able to see doctors regularly, which ensures they stay healthy and get screened for potential health or developmental issues.

Medicaid keeps families whole.

- Medicaid coverage keeps kids out of the child welfare system and keeps parents and children together.
- Medicaid serves as essential health care coverage for children involved with the child welfare system. The child welfare system includes children who are in or at-risk of entering foster care, those living with relative caregivers, and those adopted out of care.
 - An estimated 99% of children in foster care have Medicaid coverage.
- This is about much more than visits to the doctor. Medicaid provides coverage for the services that support parents, stabilize families and make it possible for children to stay at home.
 - For example, Medicaid covers mental health services and addiction recovery programs for parents so they can take care of their kids and avoid unnecessary child welfare placements.
 - Medicaid also provides funds for home visiting, an evidence-based strategy to support families and reduce risk of child abuse and neglect.
- The economic stability and well-being that comes with having reliable health coverage helps prevent families from needing child welfare system interventions.

Programs supported by these mandatory federal funding provide vital support to children, youth, older adults, and families across the country. Cuts to these crucial programs would not only end critical programs families rely on, but it also threatens the health and well-being of countless families.

Cuts to Medicaid and other key programs will slash state budgets for prevention supports and child welfare agencies, forcing **STATE's taxpayers to make up the difference.**

Supplemental Talking Points

Waste, Fraud, and Abuse

- There have been and continue to be extensive efforts to root out fraud and abuse in the Medicaid system, and they've been effective
 - **[Include an example from your state as appropriate.]**
- While we will continue to be vigilant to prevent abuse of Medicaid, the truth is the program is doing what it's intended to do: providing critical and comprehensive care to children and families who would otherwise go without.

Additional Information, Helpful Definitions, and Resources

▮ **Reconciliation**

Budget reconciliation is a special parliamentary procedure in the United States Congress that allows for expedited passage of certain federal budget legislation in the Senate. It overrides the filibuster rules, which would otherwise require a 60-vote supermajority for passage. The process begins when the House and Senate Budget Committees include instructions in their annual budget resolution for other committees to develop and report legislation that has specified effects on mandatory spending, revenues, or the debt limit. Reconciliation directives instruct specified committees to prepare and report legislation that either increases or decreases spending, revenues, or modifies the public debt limit.

More information available [here](#).

▮ **Sequestration**

Sequestration refers to automatic spending cuts that occur through the withdrawal of funding for certain (but not all) government programs. CBO provides estimates of the statutory caps on discretionary funding and an assessment of whether sequestration might be necessary under current budgetary rules, but the Administration's Office of Management and Budget makes the ultimate determination of whether a sequestration is necessary and, if so, how big it should be.

More information available [here](#).

▮ **Resources**

This list of resources is available for your use in educating policymakers and partners about why Medicaid and other critical programs matter. Feel free to share these resources widely!

- [Medicaid and Home Visiting](#)
- [Medicaid Matters for Kids: A Smart Investment in Our Future](#)
- [Supporting Home Visiting: A Guide to State and Federal Funding](#)
- [Policy Basics: Introduction to Medicaid](#) (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)
- [ChildTrends Report on the Social Services Block Grant and Child Welfare](#)
- [ChildTrends Report on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Child Welfare](#)

- [ChildTrends State-by-State Child Welfare Spending Profiles](#)