

Dear Administrator Power,

On behalf of the organizations that reached out to Acting Administrator Steele in March of this year, I want to thank you for your thoughtful response to our letter emphasizing the importance of investing in young children and families, especially those caught in crises. We particularly appreciate your recognition of the critical importance of the early years and your overview of USAID's admirable investments.

We understand - and value - the Agency's current focus on expanding global vaccine access to combat COVID-19. As this work accelerates in the coming months, it will become increasingly important to focus more attention on the secondary impacts of COVID -- sharp increases in severe poverty, nutritional declines, learning loss and a rise in child protection challenges including the loss of caregivers. Without high-level leadership and prioritization of the needs of vulnerable children, the Agency will not be able to meet its overall goals in alleviating the worst impacts of COVID.

As you and your team continue addressing the existing and expanding challenges faced by children and families in crisis, we want to offer the support of our organizations and the networks to which we belong. Collectively, we are funding, shaping, and implementing some of the largest early childhood programs in the world, generating robust evidence of what works in a wide range of contexts, and working to reach children around the world with integrated and holistic programming that meets their needs across traditional sectoral divides.

Drawing on this experience, we hope to work with you to:

Support effective country-level implementation of the Global Child Thrive Act

Many of our organizations were leading voices calling for passage of the Global Child Thrive Act (GCTA) and, through the Thrive Coalition, we have been working closely with your team and others throughout the U.S. government (USG) to support its implementation. In the coming months, we will be identifying the most promising country-level contexts in which to engage with USG missions on implementation of the Act, and we look forward to working together with relevant bureaus to share promising implementation examples.

We would welcome your office's collaboration on this, ensuring that your vocal support for implementation reaches all relevant bureaus and offices. To facilitate implementation of the GCTA in the United States and abroad, we also encourage your team to reflect the need for increased and coordinated early childhood development funding – particularly in crisis contexts – in forthcoming budget discussions and proposals.

Ensure that leadership measures are in place to support our shared goals

We are keenly aware of the role that dedicated leadership can have for this agenda. That is why we strongly urge filling key positions with permanent leadership as quickly as possible and providing those staff with the support and authority they need to work effectively across

bureaus and country missions. Chief among these roles is the Special Advisor on Children in Adversity. The acting advisor is doing admirable work, but the role requires a permanent and fully empowered leader to effectively carry out the mandate of the office.

The portfolio of the Special Advisor is already crucial to the Agency’s objectives in COVID-19 response on issues such as health (including mental health), basic education, and nutrition. As the secondary impacts become more evident, these issues will become even more urgent. Given this, we encourage a prominent place for this portfolio in your COVID discussions so that the needs of vulnerable children can be reflected in both COVID-related policy decisions and resource allocations.

While the role of the Special Advisor is vital, the success of our collective efforts cannot rest on one individual alone. To support this agenda, we request that you identify early childhood development – especially for children in crisis – as an agency-wide priority and build in accountability mechanisms to follow through on this prioritization. Our community stands ready to partner in the development of specific targets and an associated action plan to track progress towards meeting early childhood development milestones.

Engage in ongoing policy development and financing across the agency

We appreciate the openness of your teams to engaging with our community in your ongoing policy development processes. As these agendas move forward and you undertake new policy planning processes, we encourage similar openness and consultation with the wide range of stakeholders committed to the success of your work.

We would welcome the opportunity to work together to share our experience as implementers, technical experts, funders, researchers and advocates, informing your work to ensure that the available financing for young children is as effective and efficiently delivered as possible.

Sincerely,

