

# Congressional Meeting Briefing Document: The Global Child Thrive Act

## LEADING THE WAY ON MIGRATION & HUNGER

### Overview

*This document will assist you in preparing to meet with the offices of your members of Congress.*

CRS believes that our work together in the U.S. is the outward expression of missionary discipleship. Together, we are called to encounter Christ in the members of our human family most in need, and to share the Good News with others, becoming prophetic advocates for justice and the common good.

We have campaigns to *lead the way* on the global issues of hunger and forced displacement and migration. Our Lead the Way on Migration campaign is focused on ensuring our brothers and sisters on the move can exercise their right to lead dignified lives, and ultimately thrive. Our Lead the Way on Hunger campaign calls forth a vision where all people have the conditions they need to access regular, healthy food, ensuring optimal nutrition to ultimately thrive. **Your congressional meetings, and other forms of communication with offices, will be an opportunity to take part in these campaigns to support our human family suffering from poverty, hunger, forced migration and displacement.**

**As an opportunity to stand with migrants, refugees and those experiencing hunger and malnutrition, your congressional meetings will focus on advocating for the Global Child Thrive Act. This legislation directs the integration of Early Childhood Development activities into current international programs supporting vulnerable children and their families.**

**The talking points on pages 3-5 can serve as a guide for how to structure your meeting with the offices of your members of Congress so that you can highlight this issue in your conversation.** The most important part of your preparation is to reflect on how you will express why you, and your community, care about these issues—as well as the stories you can share with the offices you meet with about how you and your community are engaged on these issues of importance and support those most vulnerable around the world.

### BACKGROUND ON MIGRATION AND HUNGER

The unprecedented global challenge of COVID-19 will require a comprehensive and extraordinary international response to save lives, care for those affected and ensure human dignity. COVID-19 is particularly dire for communities that are already vulnerable, including refugees, migrants, and those suffering from food insecurity. According to the UN, there are almost 80 million people forcibly displaced around the world, 26 million of whom are refugees, and 135 million people requiring emergency food assistance. The international community already faced daunting challenges in 2020, and COVID-19 exacerbates these existing hardships. As COVID-19 continues to spread around the world, CRS and our partners are adapting programs to address the needs of older adults and vulnerable children, refugees and migrants, people with compromised immune systems and their caregivers, as well as other high-risk populations.

Pope Francis reminds us, “This is not a time for indifference, because the whole world is suffering and needs to be united in facing the pandemic.” Serving more than 159 million people in 114 countries in 2019, CRS can attest first-hand to the significant challenges poor and vulnerable communities encounter, especially those who are hungry or have been displaced, and to the impact of poverty-reducing foreign assistance. To end poverty, hunger, and disease, and to support migrants and the forcibly displaced, CRS provides shelter to refugees, helps farmers to grow better crops in the face of climate change or drought, promotes peace in communities divided by differences, creates opportunities for parents and caregivers to learn about nutrition and how to support their children’s development, and provides immediate response in emergencies. CRS is proud to partner with the U.S. government to bring hope and safety to communities—from refugees fleeing Syria to farmers seeking opportunity in El Salvador.

## BACKGROUND ON LEGISLATION AND CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

### Early Childhood Development

According to a report published in *The Lancet*, “a staggering 43 percent of children under five years of age—an estimated 250 million—living in low- and middle-income countries are at risk of suboptimal development caused by poverty, nutritional deficiencies, and inadequate learning opportunities.”

Early childhood is the period of life that begins prenatally and extends to eight years of age. Poor health and nutrition, inadequate learning opportunities, and exposure to conflict and displacement impair children’s ability to reach optimal developmental milestones and can have profound and long-lasting impact on their brains and bodies. The good news is that high-quality interventions can mitigate the impact of these factors. Early Childhood Development (ECD) endeavors to support children’s holistic well-being in these early years when critical brain architecture is built. Integrated Early Childhood Development programming includes age-appropriate mental stimulation and nurturing care such as singing and reading, playing with colorful objects and shapes, and interactive caregiving.

A 20-year study of children in Jamaica by James Heckman, Paul Gertler, and others showed that Early Childhood Development interventions for children zero to three years of age increased their future earnings by 25 percent. Conversely, the failure to invest in ECD has significant repercussions on a country’s economic growth, peace, and prosperity. Adults who experienced suboptimal care during their early childhood years will earn significantly less than the average adult in their country and are more likely to drop out of school. This lost income and potential traps families in poverty, lowers their country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and reduces tax revenues, leaving families and countries with less to spend on health and education.

### *What is the connection between the realities of forced displacement and children?*

We know more today about the effects of toxic stress on a young brain. Being uprooted from home as a young child can have significant negative repercussions on a child’s overall development. For example, the chaos and fear associated with life on the move can directly disrupt a child’s brain development given that when a child feels unsafe, his or her brain will spend more time focusing on survival, rather than on new areas of growth and exploration. Children experiencing toxic stress will grow smaller brains with fewer neural connections than children who are not traumatized; they may experience speech or reading delays, and later suffer from depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues. In addition, migrants often have a lack of adequate nutrient intake and limited access to health care. This can be particularly devastating if children experience these deprivations during key developmental windows, such as the first years of life. Studies have found that forced migration during early childhood was significantly associated with poor cognitive well-being later in life.

### *What is the connection between hunger, malnutrition and children?*

It is not enough for children to simply have access to food, they need *the right kind of nutritious food with sufficient vitamins, minerals and protein* to properly grow and develop. Hundreds of millions of children worldwide lack access to proper nutritional intake. Malnutrition stunts children’s growth and impairs their cognitive and physical development. It is the underlying cause of 45 percent of all preventable deaths worldwide of children under five. Incorporating Early Childhood Development activities (such as helping caregivers to use mealtime as a place to bond with children) into U.S. government-

funded food security and nutrition programs would multiply positive outcomes for children. Nutrition programs are more effective and impactful if they are combined with Early Childhood Development (ECD).

**Moving from Surviving to Thriving:** The United States has been a world leader in saving children’s and mothers’ lives for the past 30 years. Since 1990, an estimated 100 million children have been saved, due in large part to the United States’ investment in child survival programs funded through the annual appropriations process. In addition, maternal mortality rates have dropped 44 percent with the help of U.S. funding. With simple, cost-effective interventions like monitoring children’s growth, immunizations, treatment for diarrhea, pneumonia, and malaria, and clean water and sanitation, millions of children and mothers are alive today who otherwise would not be.

While the global community has made great strides in ending the preventable deaths of mothers and children, there is more that can be done to multiply the impact of this funding. Millions of children who live through bouts of pneumonia or diarrheal disease because of child survival efforts still bear the burden of poor developmental outcomes. Thanks to new scientific research, we know better how to support human brain growth.

Experts now recommend targeting caregivers and vulnerable children with Early Childhood Development interventions during the first years of life to ensure children living in adversity do not fall below their potential. **Unfortunately, the U.S. government does not yet prioritize the integration of ECD into international programs that serve children.**

**The solution:** The Global Child Thrive Act, if enacted, would mandate where relevant that Early Child Development be integrated into current U.S. foreign aid programs, including our humanitarian programs, that support vulnerable children and their families. The bill does not call for additional funding, just a small modification of current foreign aid programs that serve vulnerable children and their families to ensure the greatest impact.

### **What is the State of Play with the legislation?**

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, Representatives Joaquin Castro (D-TX) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) in the House and Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Chris Coons (D-DE) in the Senate simultaneously introduced the Global Child Thrive Act (H.R. 4864 and S. 2715). At this time, we have **two possible routes** to final Congressional passage of the Global Child Thrive Act—*one via the House National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) bill and one via S. 2715, the Senate Global Child Thrive Act*. In the coming weeks, we will be evaluating which avenue has the best chances of success, but in the meantime, we will actively pursue both routes.

- **Route via the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA):** The **House version of the bill**, H.R. 4864, was marked up and successfully reported out of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on December 18, 2019. In July 2020, the lead sponsors of the House bill were evaluating opportunities to advance the bill in the House and decided to add the bill as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The NDAA, with the GCT Act amendment attached, was subsequently passed by the House of Representatives. The House version of the NDAA will now be taken up by the House and Senate NDAA Conference Committee (most likely in September 2020) to work out the differences with the Senate version of the bill. The Senate NDAA does not contain the GCT Act amendment. We will seek to ensure the GCT Act amendment is included in the final NDAA bill. Once the NDAA Conference Committee reports out its final version of the NDAA, Congress will then pass it and send it to the President for his signature.
- **Standard route of passage for bill in the Senate via the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC):** Thanks to your advocacy, great movement has taken place on the Senate side as well. We recently heard that the **Senate version of the bill**, S. 2715, was likely to be considered by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) at an anticipated business meeting. This is a significant achievement as SFRC has been disinclined to hold additional meetings and has hundreds of bills that were waiting for consideration. S. 2715 is likely to pass out of SFRC without controversy if considered for a business meeting, so this was very promising. This next SFRC business meeting has not been scheduled.



## TALKING POINTS FOR CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS

You can check [here](#) for the current list of House cosponsors and [here](#) for the Senate list of cosponsors. Follow the links here for the [House Tracker](#) and [Senate Tracker](#) to monitor the bills' movements in each chamber.

### FRAMING

- Thank you:
  - Thank you for giving your time to discuss international development and humanitarian issues.
    - Please **check their website** and thank your member for something they have done in the past. If you cannot find something that relates to the topic or another issue you care about, thank them for their service in Congress.
- Introduction: Who You Are and Why You're There
  - We're here today to talk about the unprecedented level of forced migration around the world and the need to promote just policies that allow people on the move, especially children, to exercise their right to lead safe and dignified lives, and ultimately thrive.
    - This is an opportunity to share about yourself, your work in the state/district and your connection to CRS as you set the stage for the issues.
- Moving to the issue: Set the Stage for the Conversation
  - The U.S. government has long supported children and families living in poverty around the world. We are grateful for bipartisan Congressional leadership in this area and are here today to ask for your support for legislation which will multiply the impact of our nation's poverty-focused international development and humanitarian assistance without calling for additional funding. Thanks to recent findings, we know we can maximize our foreign aid investments by ensuring children not only survive preventable diseases but thrive. We can do this by incorporating Early Childhood Development activities into U.S. international programs focused on vulnerable children and their families.
    - Share a story about the benefits of poverty-focused international programs around the world and why it is critically important that the United States build on these successes by ensuring vulnerable children can grow up to thrive and reach their God-given potential.
    - **Most importantly**, share a personal story about how you and others in your community have worked to mobilize to end the worst aspects of global poverty—particularly around issues of forced migration and hunger.

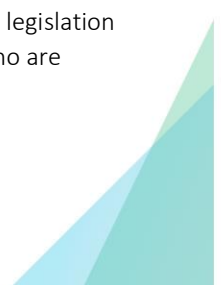
### THE ASK: SENATE

If your Senator is **not** an existing cosponsor: ([Check here](#)):

- **We urge the Senator to cosponsor S. 2715, the Global Child Thrive Act.** This legislation would direct the administration to integrate Early Childhood Development activities into foreign aid programs supporting vulnerable children and their families. The passage into law of this legislation would allow for a more effective use of foreign aid funding and multiply positive outcomes for children who are currently at risk of falling short of their developmental potential. [*Sens. Coons (D-DE) and Blunt (R-MO) are leading in the Senate.*]

If your Senator is **already a cosponsor**: ([Check here](#)):

- **Thank you for cosponsoring S. 2715, the Global Child Thrive Act.** As you know, the passage into law of this legislation would allow for a more effective use of foreign aid funding and multiply positive outcomes for children who are currently at risk of falling short of their developmental potential.



- The Global Child Thrive Act (S. 2715) has been referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and needs additional support to move forward. *Please consider speaking or writing to Chairman James Risch (R-ID) and Ranking member, Bob Menendez (D-NJ), to urge holding a business meeting and urge the consideration of S. 2715.*

## THE ASK: HOUSE

If your Representative is **not** an existing cosponsor: ([Check here](#))

- The Global Child Thrive Act was marked up and successfully reported out of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs at the end of 2019 and in July 2020 was successfully included as an amendment to the House National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) bill.
- **We urge the Representative to speak or write to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) Conference Committee to urge inclusion of the Global Child Thrive Act amendment in the final NDAA bill.** The amendment would direct the administration to integrate Early Childhood Development activities into foreign aid programs supporting vulnerable children and their families. The passage into law of this amendment would allow for a more effective use of foreign aid funding and multiply positive outcomes for children who are currently at risk of falling short of their developmental potential. *[Reps. Castro (D-TX) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA) are leading the effort in the House.]*

If your Representative is **already** a cosponsor: ([Check here](#))

- **Thank you for cosponsoring H.R. 4864, the Global Child Thrive Act.** As you know, the passage into law of this legislation would allow for a more effective use of foreign aid funding and multiply positive outcomes for children who are currently at risk of falling short of their developmental potential.
- The Global Child Thrive Act was marked up and successfully reported out of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs at the end of 2019 and in July 2020 was successfully included as an amendment to the House NDAA bill. *Please consider asking the NDAA Conference Committee to urge this amendment be included in the final NDAA bill.*

## QUESTIONS/COMMENTS TO RAISE

- If the Member of Congress travels abroad, please ask that they let you know if they would like to visit CRS programming. CRS operates in 114 countries around the world and integrates ECD into programs in 20 countries serving 1.36 million children and their families and would welcome an opportunity to show the Member of Congress the impact U.S. dollars have on the ground, when it is safe.
- Ask that they please see you and CRS as resources both in the state/district and in Washington, DC.
- Please express an interest in continuing to dialogue with the Senator/Representative, or his/her staff, on these and other issues of mutual interest.

