

# *The Social Services Block Grant Coalition*

April 15, 2020

Dear Member of Congress:

Representing a diverse coalition of groups serving vulnerable populations, the undersigning organizations urge Congress to increase funding to the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) by \$4.1 billion to respond to the growing needs of older people, children and families, and people with disabilities in the midst of COVID-19. We also urge Congress to include no less than a 5 percent set-aside for Tribes, which does not exist in the current Title XX statute.

SSBG is a proven key source of support to help communities respond to critical needs in national disasters and an important tool in times of recession because it can provide assistance to cash-strapped states, territories, and counties quickly. It has been used to assist states and territories hit by catastrophic hurricanes including Katrina and Wilma.

In past natural disasters, Congress has used SSBG to supplement relief efforts. SSBG can provide necessary patch funding behind the overall disaster and emergency funds, which do not always address the unique needs of communities and human services.

In 2006 and 2008, Congress used SSBG to target support for communities hit by flooding and hurricanes. FY 2008 appropriations language explicitly directed HHS to target funds to states based on “demonstrated need in accordance with objective criteria that are made available to the public.” Based on FEMA data and claims, Congress was able to provide funding to twenty states and Puerto Rico based on their needs—needs that went above and beyond other emergency supplemental funds Congress had provided through other departments and programs.

In 2006, supplemental SSBG funding in the amount of \$550 million was provided for expenses related to the consequences of the Gulf Coast hurricanes of 2005. Congress expanded the potential services that SSBG could be used for to include for repair, renovation and construction of the health facilities, child care and other human services facilities that suffered great devastation as a result of the hurricanes.

Factors used to allocate SSBG funds included the number of FEMA registrants from hurricanes as well as the percent of individuals in poverty in each state. Funds were also provided to non-hurricane states that took in evacuees from the flooding and destruction.

SSBG is an important tool that Congress must use in this pandemic. Such funding can be targeted to state and local “hot-spots” threatened by COVID-19. Such funding can also be used to provide additional fortification of critical needs that are now emerging and will require addressing as our country heals.

**We urge you to include \$4.1 billion for SSBG in response to COVID-19.** The 2006 supplemental SSBG funding provided by Congress covered 20 states and Puerto Rico. To cover all fifty states including the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories at comparable rates to the 2006 relief would mean Congress needs to provide at least \$1.6 billion in emergency funding. We propose more than doubling that total to address the heavier and wider need exhibited in this crisis, inflation since 2006, and the need to include tribal communities which have been left behind in the past. We highlight the following key areas that need the added support and focus SSBG can bring:

**Charitable resources** are under duress and in some communities drying up as funds constrict and demands increase. These charities provide or supplement local human services. In addition, these charities need to be supported now so that they will still exist in the aftermath of this pandemic.

**Tax revenue** is constricting as income tax, sales tax and other funding revenue such as licensing fees and lottery revenues are being lost due to the severe economic downturn. The impact of this will vary by state and by local governing jurisdiction depending on how that tax base is supported. States, territories, and localities that rely upon these tax revenues to fund critical social services may be able to use emergency SSBG funding to maintain those important functions.

**Family Violence and Abuse** concerns are being raised across the country (and globe) about the impact social isolation and economic stress is creating for many families and individuals. Adult protective services (elder and younger adults with disabilities), intimate partner violence services and child protective services must be able to respond not just to reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation but also must be able to provide preventive and supportive services. Staff providing these services must also be recognized for their difficult task and provided with the tools they require to meet this growing need.

**County Governments** Ten states pass through SSBG funds directly to their county governments, which in turn draw on these funds to provide essential services to vulnerable populations, including children and youth in foster care, older adults at risk of abuse and people with disabilities. In other instances, funds are allocated by a county-related formula. SSBG funds could therefore offer direct assistance to county governments, including those in isolated areas or with smaller populations which may not be able to access other emergency funding streams.

**Workforce** There is any number of needs for the human service workforce both essential workers and those workers that will need to increase their workloads as the pandemic subsides. There is a range of unpredictable needs and flexible funds that are needed in this emergency to respond effectively. The range of needs includes proper equipment and protection, and the need for greater access to technology and advanced methods of connecting and providing resources to families wherever they are living.

**Tribal Communities** In the past tribal communities have been left out of emergency funding despite being impacted by disasters. This pandemic is not selective in the people chosen by the

virus, but this pandemic will have especially severe and disproportionate impacts on communities that have already been struggling or underserved. Tribal governments must be included in this funding and they should receive no less than 5 percent of the emergency funding in a set-aside.

These are some of the major areas of concern that SSBG can help states, territories, and communities address beyond the categorical funding provided in the previously enacted COVID-19 packages. There are other service needs that SSBG can assist with due to its flexibility, but these are some of the most critical we can foresee at this time. As Congress creates additional packages to respond to COVID-19, we strongly urge increased support for SSBG to respond to the needs of our nation's most vulnerable—older adults, children and families, and people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Strong Families and Communities  
American Association of Service Coordinators (AASC)  
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)  
American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children  
Association of Children's Residential Centers (ACRC)  
Campaign for Trauma Informed Policy and Practice  
Child Welfare League of America  
Children's Advocacy Institute  
Children's Defense Fund  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces  
Elder Justice Coalition  
Family Centered Treatment Foundation  
Family Focused Treatment Association  
Generations United  
Grand Families  
International Association for Indigenous Aging  
Justice in Aging  
Meals on Wheels America  
National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)  
National Adult Protective Services Association  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
National Association of Counsel for Children  
National Association of Counties (NACo)  
National Association of County Human Services Administrators (NACHSA)  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Center for Youth Law  
National Human Services Assembly  
National Indian Child Welfare Association  
National Indian Council on Aging  
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence  
National Respite Coalition  
Network of Jewish Human Agencies

North American Council on Adoptable Children  
Prevent Child Abuse America  
Saint Francis Ministries  
Swirca & More  
Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER)  
ZERO TO THREE

## **STATE AND LOCAL**

Addiction Connections Resource  
Aging & In-Home Services of Northeast Indiana, Inc  
Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association  
Alliance for Children's Rights  
Area 10 Council on Aging of Monroe & Owen Counties, Inc.  
Area Agency on Aging District 7 (Ohio)  
Area Five Agency  
Area IV Agency on Aging and Community Action Programs  
Arizona Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence  
Arizona Family Health Partnership  
Assertive Family Solutions.org  
Auglaize County Department of Job and Family Services  
Belmont County Board of Commissioners  
Belmont County Department of Job and Family Services  
CCFAPA  
Champaign County (Ohio) Department of Job and Family Services  
Childrens Service Society - Grandfamilies Kinship Care  
CICOA Aging & In-Home Solutions  
Citrus Family Care Network  
Cornerstones of Care  
County Welfare Directors Association of California  
Cuyahoga County Advisory Board on Senior and Adult Services  
Edgewood Center for Children and Families  
Foster Kinship  
Grandparents Raising America's Children to Excel, Inc.  
HALOS  
Hancock County Job & Family Services  
Indiana Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
John Burton Advocates for Youth  
Kansas Association of Area Agencies on Aging & Disabilities  
Licking County Job and Family Services  
LifeSpan Resources  
LifeStream Services, Inc  
LifeSTEPS  
LifeTime Resources, Inc.  
Madison County Foster & Adoptive Parent Association  
Maine Council on Aging  
Maria Seymour Brooker Memorial  
Maryland Association of Social Services Directors

Missouri Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
Morgan County DJFS  
North Central- Flint Hills Rea Agency on Aging, Inc.  
Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging  
Northwest Indiana Community Action, (Area 1 Agency on Agong)  
Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association  
Orange County Department of Social Services  
Ottawa County Department of Job and Family Services  
Pima Council on Aging  
Protecting Arizona's Family Coalition  
REAL Services  
Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina  
Solano County Health and Social Services  
The Children's Home Society of New Jersey  
The Texas Foster Care Association  
Thrive Alliance  
Upper Potomac AAA  
Walden Family Services  
West Central Indiana Economic Development District/Area 7  
World Hunger Education, Advocacy & Training (WHEAT)  
White River Area Agency on Aging  
Wildfire: Igniting Community Action to End Poverty in Arizona  
Women's Rights and Empowerment Network (WREN)