

Child poverty in the U.S. remains high, with 15.5 million (21.1 percent of children) living below the poverty line in 2014. Children continue to disproportionately experience poverty in our society – while they make up 23 percent of the total population, they comprise 33 percent of people living in poverty. Furthermore, poverty is a particularly serious problem for children, who suffer negative effects for the rest of their lives after living in poverty for even a short time.

Beyond consequences for individual children, child poverty negatively affects the entire nation through increased expenditures on criminal justice and healthcare and through lost revenue and economic output. Yet there remains a lack of awareness and government accountability to address the significant problem of child poverty, and proposed solutions are too often politicized and fall along partisan lines.

Create a National Child Poverty Target

In order to significantly reduce child poverty in the U.S. we need to establish a target to cut child poverty in half in ten years. Creating a national target to reduce child poverty is not unprecedented. In 1999, the United Kingdom established a national child poverty target, which united the Conservative and Labour parties. Measured in U.S. terms, the UK's Child Poverty Target and resulting policy changes cut Britain's child poverty rate by 50 percent during the effort's first decade (1999-2009). By contrast, the U.S. child poverty rate increased by over 20 percent, from 16.2 percent in 2000 to 21.1 percent in 2014.



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The Child Poverty Reduction Act of 2015 (H.R. 2408/S. 2224)

The Child Poverty Reduction Act would establish a national target to reduce the number of children living in poverty in America by half in ten years and eliminating child poverty in twenty years, as well as institute a process to identify the most effective interventions to meet this target, including:

- Charges a Federal Interagency Working Group on Reducing Child Poverty with developing a plan, including recommendations to improve the coordination and efficiency of existing initiatives as well as recommendations for new legislation required to reach the target;
- Requests the National Academy of Sciences to assist in the development of a plan by researching the societal costs of child poverty, the role of metrics in assessing the effects of child poverty and the performance of anti-poverty programs, as well as make non-partisan recommendations on how to reduce child poverty;
- Tasks the working group with monitoring progress toward the target at the federal and state levels.

A Rallying Cry

A child poverty target can serve as a rallying cry for the government and other stakeholders to take concrete steps to meet this target. It institutionalizes the goal of reducing child poverty, and serves as an impetus for public debate around the most effective interventions needed to achieve this target.

The First Focus Campaign for Children is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization affiliated with First Focus, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization. The Campaign for Children advocates directly for legislative change in Congress to ensure children and families are a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. For more information, visit www.ffcampaignforchildren.org.