



Dear Senator Booker:

Having Kids, a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that all children receive a fair start in life, applauds your leadership in passing the CARES Act. Looking ahead to future stimulus legislation, we echo the words of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in saying that we must now “[double down](#).”

For us, doubling down means not only helping families weather the current public health crisis, but also acting swiftly to prevent the next one. To do either, we need to invest in an equitable, child-centered approach to family planning *right now*.

We know that [overcrowding](#), [economic inequality](#), and [consumption of wildlife](#) are all drivers of pandemics. And we commend the efforts you have already made in advancing women’s health by sponsoring the Access to Birth Control Act, to promote children’s equity through the use of opportunity accounts, and to protect the well-being of people and animals by calling to ban international wildlife trade and wet markets. But we also know that none of these drivers can be addressed in isolation. We therefore invite you to join us in connecting the dots between access to contraception, economic equity, and environmental protection by leveraging future stimulus legislation to invest in strategies that align with a [Fair Start model](#).

Supporting women during the pandemic means supporting family planning.

COVID-19 has severely limited women’s ability to choose when to have children.

Last week, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals [upheld](#) Texas’ decision to ban abortions during the coronavirus crisis. Oklahoma, Ohio, Alabama, Kentucky, Indiana, Kansas, and other states have signaled an intention to follow Texas’ lead. Because the Hyde Amendment applies to the \$150 billion regional stabilization fund included in the CARES Act, state governments that wish to support access to reproductive health services during the crisis cannot use these funds to do so.

This restriction on reproductive rights comes at a time when women face growing [hurdles to preventing pregnancy](#). Because most forms of birth control require a prescription or placement by a healthcare provider, many women must now weigh the benefits of accessing family planning services against the risks of leaving home during a pandemic. Women may also face limited access to public transportation, gaps in medical insurance during layoffs, or otherwise

lack the funds to pay for contraception. And many young women who usually get their birth control from school-based health centers are finding these locations closed.

The [CDC acknowledges](#) that “unintended pregnancy carries significant health and economic consequences and disproportionately affects poor women and women of color.” As the global economy teeters on the brink of a depression, the potential consequences of unplanned pregnancies are more severe than ever. The [March jobs report](#) indicated that the U.S. economy lost 701,000 jobs in one month alone. Unemployed individuals will now find it even more difficult to get back to work if faced with the difficulties of an unplanned birth. And the disparities in access to healthcare exacerbated by the pandemic are likely to compound the health risks already facing children who are the result of unplanned pregnancies.

Taking action on family planning is critically important to protecting the health and well-being of tomorrow’s parents and children.

Reducing the impact of future pandemics requires investing in family planning today.

The challenges brought on by COVID-19 compel us to not only *react* with short-term solutions, but also to *plan* for long-term prevention.

The World Health Organization has warned that [overcrowding exacerbates epidemics](#) and other [public health experts agree](#). In particular, researchers have concluded that high population densities catalyze the spread of COVID-19. [New data](#) shows that while non-metro areas in the United States are seeing 0.43 deaths from COVID-19 per 100,000 people, this number rises to an *alarming 3.98 deaths per 100,000 in urban counties*.

While a lack of access to family planning is not the only factor driving population density, policies that support parents in delaying childbirth and having smaller families can ultimately help to reduce overcrowding, thereby mitigating the impact of future epidemics.

We also know that [economic inequality can be a powerful driver of pandemics](#), as individuals facing poverty are often unable to stay safely at home and must go out to find work. Because [improving access to contraceptives is closely linked with reducing poverty](#) for women and for future generations, investing in family planning today can help mitigate the impacts of infectious disease in the future.

The Fair Start Model offers short-term solutions with long-term benefits.

[The Fair Start model](#) encourages parents to have [smaller families](#) and to [delay having kids until they are ready](#). It also works to ensure that communities and governments provide the resources necessary to guarantee that all kids have a fair start.

[Our research](#) shows that a child-centered family planning model has an immediate impact on families by providing them with the resources to delay having children and by increasing support

when they do. This means that families — and society at large — can invest more in each child to ensure a fair start for everyone.

The model also begins [upstream](#) to solve many of the problems that threaten generations to come. Choosing smaller families is [20 times more effective](#) at reducing climate change than adjusting dietary or transportation habits alone. The Fair Start model also helps to reduce the [negative impacts on animals](#) that come from factory farming and degradation of animal habitats related to overcrowding.

We are cognizant of the unfortunate fact that foreign aid has been used to target vulnerable populations with coercive family planning models. We therefore reject forceful tactics, such as China's one-child policy, in favor of an approach that informs parents of the benefits of the Fair Start model while leaving them to make their own choices.

By supporting parents in their decision to have smaller families, the Fair Start model promotes healthier and better-prepared communities that support a more sustainable global society.

Stimulus packages provide a unique opportunity to stabilize today's families while protecting future generations.

Today's stimulus packages offer an opportunity to support and incentivize planning tomorrow's families. We therefore ask that you align future stimulus packages with the priorities of a child-centered Fair Start model. We specifically recommend that you support the following strategies:

- **Guarantee a Sustainable Child Income Through Baby Bonds:** Having Kids [commends and supports](#) the progress you have made toward making opportunity accounts a reality for our children. As you are aware, [recent legislation](#) sponsored by U.S. Sens. Mitt Romney and Michael Bennet would use the child-tax credit system as a means of simply paying women to have kids. We appreciate your rejection of their pro-natalist approach in favor of an equity-focused strategy. We see COVID-19 stimulus legislation as an opportunity to continue this momentum by supporting sustainable income for children. Given that this pandemic has exacerbated inequality, we encourage you to consider substantially increasing the amount of the proposed bonds. Additionally, in light of the numerous [economic, health, and social benefits of waiting to have](#) kids, we also encourage you to structure the bonds in a way that incentivizes delaying pregnancy until at least age 25. Please see [our model policy for the District of Columbia](#) and the attached draft law review article as a guide.
- **Expressly Protect Family Planning Services in Stimulus Legislation:** Crisis loans and telehealth measures included in the CARES Act could go a long way toward supporting family planning service providers. Distressingly, however, the Act grants the Small Business Authority and Health and Human Services the discretion to block family planning providers from accessing this support. We ask that you push to include language in stimulus packages that expressly protects support for family planning services.

- **Expand Access to Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptives:** Having Kids applauds your sponsorship of the Access to Birth Control Act. Now, as women face increased challenges in traveling to healthcare providers and pharmacies, barriers to accessing contraception are more daunting than ever. Long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs), such as intrauterine devices and hormonal implants, can help solve this problem. Between 2009 and 2015, the [Colorado Family Planning Initiative](#) worked to expand access to LARCs. The initiative cut teen births and abortions nearly in half, reduced the birth rate among young women ages 20-24 by 20 percent, and saved the state nearly 70 million dollars. As the COVID-19 crisis continues, LARCs can reduce the frequency with which women need to leave home for birth control, resulting in [more effective family planning](#) and reduced risks to public health. However, for many women, the cost of obtaining a LARC remains prohibitively expensive. While the Affordable Care Act guarantees that insured women can access LARCs at no cost to them, [the number of uninsured Americans has been rising since 2016](#). In order to support states in providing LARCs to uninsured women, we encourage you to increase funding for [Title X family planning services](#), [Title V Maternal Child Health block grants](#), and the [340b Drug Pricing Program](#) in future stimulus packages. By giving women who choose to have smaller families the tools they need to do so, policymakers will not only meet women's immediate healthcare needs, but also help to protect the future of our planet and the generations that share it.
- **Consider Measures to Prevent Child Abuse:** [Child welfare experts](#) warn that the current COVID-19 pandemic will create a [spike in child abuse cases](#). As parents face increased stress and must spend more time caring for children who are no longer in school, many families find themselves cut off from the critical support services on which they usually rely. While the CARES Act provided [critical funding for mental health and substance abuse services](#), which are powerful tools to prevent child abuse, we believe the Act does not go far enough. We urge you to include increased support for child abuse prevention measures in future stimulus legislation. We also encourage you to consider other policy solutions that address child abuse, such as amending the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act to incentivize [Fair Start order legislation](#).

Last week, the [World Health Organization](#) made clear that supporting family planning services is a “life-saving” strategy that policymakers should undertake during the current crisis. We encourage you to align the priorities of stimulus packages with the Fair Start family planning model. Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can offer support as you and your colleagues address the challenges that tie us, and future generations, together.

Sincerely,

Erika Mathews

Executive Director

Having Kids is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to reforming family planning by replacing parent-centered family planning models with the human rights-based and child-first Fair Start model. HavingKids.org | info@havingkids.org

Please see the links below for useful resources related to the Fair Start model.

Short Videos:

- [On starting upstream](#)
- [World Population Day message](#)
- [Care about animals and the planet? Think about a smaller family](#)
- [Mom shares why she chose to have one child](#)

Our peer-reviewed research:

[A Human Rights Approach to Planning Families](#)

[The Human Right to a Fair Start in Life](#)

Facts Supporting Fair Start:

<https://havingkids.org/fair-start-research/>

A deep dive into the model:

<https://havingkids.org/faqs/deepdive/>