

The ACCOUNTABILITY DIALOGUES



Recommendations for Congress

In the Fall of 2021, Futures Without Violence, Latinos United for Peace and Equity, The National Center on Violence Against Black Women (Ujima, Inc.), and Women Transforming Families, a project of Ujima, came together with survivors of domestic violence who were impacted by the child welfare system, along with state, tribal, and federal policymakers in the *Accountability Dialogues*. The Accountability Dialogues created a platform that elevated the voices of survivors and provided an opportunity for survivors, policymakers, advocates, and judges to listen to one another and advance policy solutions that would prevent further injustice to adult and child survivors of domestic violence. These recommendations and policy solutions offer a new framework: work diligently with care and compassion, and without bias, to keep families together; robustly support survivors and their children, in their community and with the resources and supports that they have identified, to meet their family's needs; and invest in communities and culturally responsive, community-based organizations to help families thrive.

1. Expand the Scope and the Prevention Funding Available under the Family First Prevention Services Act

In 2018, the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) was signed into law as part of Public Law (P.L.) 115–123 and changed the way states can spend their Title IV-E funds. It allowed states to use federal funds for prevention services so that “candidates for foster care” can stay with their caregivers or relatives. With approved plans, states can now be reimbursed for trauma-informed and evidence-based prevention services, such as in-home parent skill-based programs, evidence-based mental health services, substance abuse prevention and treatment, and kinship navigator programs. Unfortunately, as codified, FFPSA does not permit states to use these funds to help caregivers meet the basic needs of their families or address DV.

Revise FFPSA to:

- Allow states to use federal funds to provide economic and community supports for families in the child welfare system and to prevent referrals to the child welfare system. Such supports should include advocacy, housing, healthcare, childcare, transportation, cash assistance, and job training, among other things.
- Allow states to use federal funds to develop or strengthen collaborative partnerships with DV programs for survivors of DV and people who use violence with child-serving community-based organizations in order to keep children impacted by DV with their non-abusing parent and out of the child welfare system.

- Allow states to use federal funds to co-design a new Family Assistance Pathway with and for families to strengthen families and communities, prevent child abuse and neglect, and avoid foster care placements.
- Allow states to use federal funds to support innovative neighborhood- and community-based solutions that will support the social, emotional, and physical well-being of children and families in their areas and empower communities to implement these innovative, cross-system solutions.

2. Increase Federal Funds to Native American and Rural Children and Families

- Increase federal resources to serve Native American children and families, who are disproportionately impacted by the child welfare system.
- Increase federal resources to serve rural children and families, who are disproportionately impacted by the child welfare system.

3. Generously Appropriate Federal Funds for Upstream Prevention Programs

Poverty, lack of stable housing, food insecurity, absence of medical and behavioral healthcare, unsafe living conditions, racism, and structural inequities contribute to children's trauma and family instability. Economic security can help reduce trauma, DV, and child maltreatment.

Congress should pass legislation that provides, among other things:

- A permanent, fully refundable Child Tax Credit (adjusted for inflation) that is delivered monthly to ensure that families, especially caregivers and children who are experiencing DV, can achieve safety and economic security and pay for monthly expenses and basic necessities.
- A robust childcare package that ensures that all low-income families have the ability to access childcare that is high-quality, stable, affordable, and available 24/7 in a variety of settings.
- A comprehensive healthcare package that is coordinated, affordable, and culturally relevant.
- A broad array of trauma-responsive services to help families heal and thrive, including health/wellness opportunities, recreational and artistic opportunities, cultural and community connections, and mutual aid groups, along with high-quality DV and abusive partner intervention services.
- A housing package that dramatically increases the supply of affordable housing, the number of housing vouchers, and the opportunities for subsidized loans for first-time home buyers.
- A transportation package that expands public transportation options in communities, starting with those with the least access, and incentivizes private transportation options (e.g., ride sharing companies, neighbors' cars) for families to access jobs and services.

Recommendations for Congress

Congress should increase benefit levels and increase accessibility as well as flexibility to federal benefit programs, including, but not limited to:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF),
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),
- Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC),
- Medicaid,
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP),
- Childcare subsidies,
- Head Start and Early Head Start,
- Pre-K programs, and
- Transportation subsidies.