



Southern Poverty Law Center
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splcactionfund.org

September 8, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: FY24 Appropriations

Dear Chair Murray, Ranking Member Collins, Chair Granger, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the SPLC Action Fund, we write to share our insights regarding the federal programs and services that have been most impactful in building and sustaining healthy communities throughout the South, particularly when considering inflation and the rising cost of food and services. As you consider appropriations for FY 2024, we urge you to fund the agencies and programs highlighted below to strengthen their ability to protect human and civil rights and ensure opportunity for all.

As a public interest advocacy organization working in the Deep South to eliminate the structural racism and inequalities that fuel the oppression of Black, indigenous, and people of color, we understand the critical role federal investments play in addressing systemic issues that have had a generational impact on access to quality education, affordable housing, healthcare, employment, voting, police accountability, youth incarceration, and combatting hate and extremism. This insight informs our recommendations for the FY24 appropriations cycle. We believe sustained investments in the programs outlined below are impactful and cost-effective methods to assist the communities in the South that have been harmed by years of disinvestment and inequitable federal support.

A government shutdown would have devastating impacts on families working hard to make ends meet in the South. We urge you to pass a clean, bipartisan continuing resolution that fully funds critical programs and rejects harmful anti-civil rights policy riders. We applaud the Senate Appropriations Committee for passing appropriations bills that abide by the debt ceiling deal negotiations and for recognizing the need for additional emergency spending and urge the House to follow their example.

effective responses. We urge Congress to provide funding to prevent and respond to hate violence and to improve hate crime data collection.

Justice Department

- \$30 million for community-based programs to prevent and respond to hate violence, to build community resilience against hate and extremism, and to spark improvements to FBI hate crime data collection, including the creation of state-wide hate crime hotlines, as authorized by the COVID-19 Hate Crime Act (Public Law 117-13) and its Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act provisions (34 U.S.C. 30507).
- In addition to funds authorized by the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (18 U.S.C. 249) grants, \$30 million for grants designed to further community-based strategies for conflict resolution and community empowerment and education. Grants should be provided to community-based organizations and civil rights groups to implement and facilitate anti-bias educational classes and culturally competent and linguistically appropriate public education campaigns on the collection of data and public reporting of hate crimes.
- \$4 million for grants to State and local law enforcement agencies and community-based organizations to both pursue investigations and prosecutions of civil rights-era criminal activity and to promote restorative justice and community healing in the aftermath of these crimes, as authorized by the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Reauthorization Act of 2016 (Public Law 114–325).
- \$10 million for a Youth-Focused Hate Crime Prevention and Intervention Initiative to fund and develop community-based resilience and early intervention programs for youth that center social-emotional learning, not punishment. In addition, these funds should be authorized for research on the effectiveness of hate crime diversion and alternative sentencing initiatives.
- \$40 million for the Community Relations Service, the Justice Department’s essential conflict resolution, conciliation, and resolutions agency. These funds will help CRS to increase their community-based outreach, education, and violence prevention initiatives through its regional office structure.

3. Addressing Long-Term Contributors to Extremism

Over the past several years, in reports and congressional testimony, the FBI, DHS, and the intelligence community have consistently concluded that the most lethal domestic extremism threat come from (1) racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists who advocate for the superiority of the white race and (2) anti-government or anti-authority violent extremists, such as militia violent extremists.

- \$25 million for joint initiatives by the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Education to work cooperatively to help implement Pillar Four of the Biden administration’s June 2021 National Strategy to Combat Domestic Terrorism³ – a commitment to confront long-term contributors to

³ White House, *National Strategy to Counter Domestic Terrorism*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>, (June, 2021).

- extremism, including addressing systemic racism, supporting civics education, and supporting programs designed to build community resilience against hate and extremism and empower adults to help steer young people away from violent extremism.
- \$2 million to support the creation of a web-based landing page – comparable to the excellent stopbullying.gov website – that would contain supplemental evidence-based history, digital literacy, and civics education materials and resources that teachers, administrators, librarians and other educators can use to enhance educational opportunities for their students.
 - \$20 million for Domestic Extremism and Radicalization Research targeted toward developing a better understanding of white supremacy and the domestic radicalization phenomenon, advancing evidence-based strategies for effective intervention and prevention.

4. Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act – Title II and V, Sentencing Alternatives for Caregivers, and Violence Interruption

Youth incarceration practices are a serious problem. For example, Louisiana is currently incarcerating young people in Angola Penitentiary, a notoriously dangerous adult prison. Although a federal district court ruled on September 8, 2023, that the children must be removed from the adult prison, many details about where they will be transferred remain to be determined, and an appeal is expected. Other states also incarcerate children in adult facilities, or in juvenile facilities in harsh conditions. Increasing federal funding for Title II will help promote prevention and provide funding for alternatives that protect youth from the physical and emotional danger of being placed in adult prisons and jails or harsh and inadequately resourced juvenile facilities. Increases in Title V funding will help youth at the local level remain free from the juvenile legal system.

- \$80 million to carry out programs under Title II of the JJDPA.
- \$70 million to carry out programs under Title V of the JJDPA.
- \$110 million for youth mentoring grants.
- \$10 million in funding for grants from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs to fund state, local, and community agencies to replicate successful parenting sentencing alternative programs.
- \$55 million for the Community Violence Intervention Initiative. This program supports community-based organizations in cities, demonstrating the greatest need as they implement proven public health strategies that reduce violence.

Financial Services and General Government

Despite the efforts in the Deep South and elsewhere to move the country backwards, our democratic institutions have mostly held up, thanks to the countless election administrators and workers tirelessly protecting the freedom to vote and ensuring our elections are safe, secure, and transparent. But these frontline defenders of democracy are under attack, too, and the integrity of our elections depends in part on sufficient funding for their critical work. Funding for HAVA Security Grants must be included in the Senate-passed FSGG bill, which will provide a crucial investment to states and localities as they continue their vital work of protecting our democracy and the freedom to vote. However, the current funding levels are woefully insufficient given the



threat to our democracy. Congress should significantly increase and sustain funding for election administration to ensure a healthy and stable democracy. In future years, the appropriation should also include a passthrough requirement and distribution formula so that a significant portion of the funding sent to states goes directly to localities most in need of election administration support.

- \$75 million in new funding to the Election Assistance Commission for states and localities to improve election administration is well under what the agency requested and falls severely below what is needed. Especially considering the Presidential election in 2024, the funding amount should be significantly increased. Under no circumstances should the appropriation for state and local election administration drop below the \$75 million in the Senate-passed bill.

Labor, Health and Human Services, Education

Robust investments to increase health care coverage, health access and affordability, and workforce development will go a long way, especially in the Deep South states that have some of the worst health outcomes, poorest health systems, and highest maternal mortality rates.⁴ In response to increased incarceration and criminalization throughout the Deep South, we urge Congress to support increased investments in the crisis response continuum, re-entry support programs for formerly incarcerated individuals, and violence intervention programs. .

- \$117 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Health and Human Services, \$1.86 billion for Community Health Centers, \$341 million for improving maternal mortality. Additionally, we urge you to make the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) permanent so that children can have access to quality, comprehensive, and affordable essential care.
- \$7.5 billion for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which includes the 5 percent set aside for mobile crisis response. The overwhelming majority of 911 calls involve mental health and substance use incidents. Specialized service providers, such as social workers, paramedics, and peer support counselors, are better equipped to handle such situations than armed officers.
- \$115 million for the Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) program at the Department of Labor’s Employment & Training Administration. The REO program provides workforce development and reentry services for individuals, including young people, with a criminal legal history.

Given our region’s history of racial segregation in schools, proliferation of school privatization, and attacks on inclusive teaching, we need more equitable funding at all levels of education, including early childhood and childcare. Nearly half of Black children, more than 1 in 3 Hispanic and Native children, and 1 in 6 white and Asian children have family incomes that are too low to

⁴ Zoya Wazir, *The Best and Worst States for Health Care Cost, Access and Outcomes*, U.S. NEWS, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/the-best-and-worst-states-for-health-care> (August 4, 2022); WISE VOTER, *Maternal Mortality Rate by State*, <https://wisevoter.com/state-rankings/maternal-mortality-rate-by-state/#maternal-mortality-rate-by-state>.



qualify for the Child Tax Credit or only receive a partial credit under the current program.⁵ We support expanding the Child Tax Credit to the estimated 19 million children to reduce child poverty in the United States.⁶

- \$79.6 billion in discretionary spending to the Department of Education, \$19.26 billion for Title I funding to high poverty schools.
- \$24.6 billion for the Pell grant program, which provides opportunities to low-income students to pursue higher education.
- \$25 million for four-year HBCUS, TCCUs, and MSIs to expand institutional research and development capacity.
- \$22.1 billion for HHS's existing early care and education programs. This would include \$8.7 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant to expand access to quality, affordable childcare for families across the country.
- \$ 12.27 billion for Head Start to help young children enter kindergarten ready to learn.
- TANF is the only federal anti-poverty program which provides direct cash assistance to families in dire need. The amount each state currently receives has not increased since 1996, and many states have already set high barriers to access the direct cash assistance program. We respectfully request that Congress resist any effort to increase barriers to access these funds.

Strong investments in civil rights and labor protections are needed to root out racism and discrimination in education, health care, and workplaces settings that are deeply entrenched in the Deep South.

- \$264.5 million to the Wage and Hour Division, \$299.2 billion to the National Labor Relations Board, and \$632.3 million to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to enforce laws that protect workers and prevent exploitative labor practices that were historically designed to disenfranchise Black and Brown workers.

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies

We support increasing funding to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's budget by \$70.06 billion. There is currently a national shortage of seven million affordable homes.⁷ Our Deep South states have some of the most tenant unfriendly laws, highest need for affordable housing, and higher rates of people experiencing homelessness.⁸ Federal investments in

⁵ Chuck Marr et al., Year-end tax policy priority: Expand the Child Tax Credit for the nineteen million children who receive less than the full credit Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-tax/year-end-tax-policy-priority-expand-the-child-tax-credit-for-the-19-million> (December 7, 2022).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION, *President Biden to unveil FY24 budget request this week*, <https://nlihc.org/resource/president-biden-unveil-fy24-budget-request-week> (March 6, 2023)

⁸ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Worse Case Housing Needs 2021 Report to Congress*, 14, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/Worst-Case-Housing-Needs-2021.pdf>; see i.e. Jill Babcock, *The Most Landlord-Friendly States in 2023*, Leaders.com, <https://leaders.com/articles/wealth/landlord-friendly-states/> (February 2, 2023); Jemima McEvoy, *Here's Where Renters Appear Suddenly Most At Risk for Eviction (Some Southern States Are Especially Vulnerable)*, FORBES,

affordable housing and homeless assistance programs benefit the lowest-income households and help individuals and families avoid eviction and homelessness. We oppose any efforts to prohibit or limit funding for implementation, administration, and enforcement of the proposed “Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing” rule, which would allow HUD to effectively and proactively address barriers to fair housing and opportunities.

- \$1.5 billion to provide funding for the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, which helps states and localities build and rehabilitate affordable housing.
- \$31.7 billion for the Housing Choice Vouchers program and \$15.79 billion for project based rental assistance programs, which help low-income people pay their rent. This funding level would provide vouchers for an additional 50,000 households with an emphasis on those who are experiencing homelessness or fleeing domestic violence.
- \$3.9 billion for Homeless Assistance Grants, which would provide aid to an additional 25,000 households.
- \$100 million in competitive grants to states and localities to prevent evictions by offering access to legal counsel and providing rental assistance. Given the end of the pandemic related eviction moratorium and the lack of affordable housing, more investments, not less investments are needed for legal assistance to prevent evictions.

Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration

A ‘hunger cliff’ is looming as states cut food stamp benefits affecting nearly thirty million Americans. A higher percentage of residents in our focus states participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program (SNAP) than the nation average and we have some of the highest child hunger rates in the country.⁹ Residents in Louisiana and Alabama will lose at least \$95 a month as SNAP temporary pandemic benefits end.¹⁰ The latest House proposed cuts to the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program would slash or take away benefits for approximately five million eligible pregnant and post-partum women and young children¹¹. And even if the program is funded at the Senate proposed level, there will be a significant shortage that will lead to for the first time a waitlist for WIC. We urge Congress to resist any effort to cut SNAP and WIC benefits during this time of high inflation. Additionally, we strongly oppose any attempt to place unnecessary requirements and time limits on these critical benefits.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jemimamcevoy/2021/08/02/heres-where-renters-appear-suddenly-most-at-risk-for-eviction-some-southern-states-are-especially-vulnerable/?sh=1e555d3969d6> (August 2, 2021); U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *2022 AHAR: Part 1 - PIT Estimates of Homelessness in the U.S.*

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/ahar/2022-ahar-part-1-pit-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us.html>, (December, 2022)

⁹ Chris Gilligan, *States with the Highest Rates of SNAP Recipients*, U.S. NEWS, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/food-stamp-benefits-by-state>, (March 16, 2023); CHILDREN’S DEFENSE FUND, *The State of America’s Children 2020*, <https://www.childrensdefense.org/policy/resources/soac-2020-child-hunger-tables/>.

¹⁰ Dottie Rosenbaum, Katie Bergh, and Lauren Hall, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Temporary Pandemic Snap Benefits will end in remaining 35 states in March*, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/temporary-pandemic-snap-benefits-will-end-in-remaining-35-states-in-march> (February 6, 2023).

¹¹ Katie Bergh and Zoe Neuberger, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Hundreds of Thousands of Young Children and Postpartum Adults Would Be Turned Away from WIC under House and Senate Funding Levels*, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/hundreds-of-thousands-of-young-children-and-postpartum-adults-would-be> (July 26, 2023).



- \$122.1 billion for the SNAP and \$7.3 billion for the WIC program, which will serve all projected participants in these critical food assistance programs.

Homeland Security

Our immigration system must protect the rights of immigrants and their children to ensure they are treated with dignity and fairness. We support policies that discourage a carceral approach to immigration and support a community-based approach to asylum and immigration.

- We urge Congress to include bill language that strengthens due process protections and allow individuals in immigration detention for longer than twenty days access to a custody determination hearing or assessment.
- We urge Congress to reject any request for supplemental funding and reprogramming requests for detention, enforcement, and surveillance operations within the Department of Homeland Security, including the request for \$1 billion in unrestricted funding to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), \$100 million in funding for invasive surveillance programs, and the development of an ICE grant program that would reinstate family detention. Those funds should instead be redirected to community-based alternatives, such as support for asylum-seekers and their families.

Thank you for your continued support for key programs to safeguard our democracy, combat hate and extremism, ensure the dignity and rehabilitation of justice-impacted individuals, and eradicate poverty. Please contact our federal policy staff members for specific inquiries: LaShawn Warren LaShawn.Warren@splcenter.org Chief Policy Officer; Michael Lieberman Michael.Lieberman@splcenter.org Senior Policy Counsel, Hate & Extremism; Lisa Borden Lisa.Borden@splcenter.org Senior Policy Counsel, International Advocacy; Theresa Lau, Theresa.Lau@splcenter.org, Senior Policy Counsel, Eradicating Poverty, and Laura Williamson Laura.Williamson@splcenter.org, Senior Policy Advisor, Democracy and Voting Rights.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Margaret Huang'.

Margaret Huang
President and Chief Executive Officer

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'LaShawn G. Warren'.

LaShawn Warren
Chief Policy Officer