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January 21, 2025

Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy
Department of Government Efficiency
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy:

On behalf of First Focus on Children, a bipartisan organization dedicated to raising attention around policy issues of importance to children and families, I am writing in response to your recent Wall Street Journal op-ed proposing to eliminate federal funding for all government programs lacking formal Congressional reauthorization. While we share your stated interest in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of government spending, we believe such a proposal is misguided for a number of reasons, including the fact that it would disproportionately harm children. Kids are already shortchanged in the federal budget and overwhelming evidence supports the fact that investing in the next generation is one of the best things our nation can do.

First, I want to emphasize that children already do not receive their fair share of the federal budget. As our report *Children's Budget 2024* finds, investments in children account for just 8.87% of total federal spending – a fraction far below what is necessary to meet the needs of our nation's children and families. In FY 2024 alone, federal investments in children declined by nearly 6%, deepening an already chronic pattern of disinvestment.

Cutting children's programs further, which your suggestion would do by eliminating over \$101.1 billion in investments in FY 2025 alone, would disproportionately harm children. Our youngest citizens cannot vote and do not have membership organizations with lobbyists who can demand their needs, concerns, and interests are heard. Therefore, it is the responsibility of policymakers, including yourselves, to ensure their needs are not overlooked.

Unfortunately, if Congress were to defund programs lacking formal Congressional authorization, children's programs would shoulder nearly 20%, or more than twice their share of total cuts, as investments in children make up less than 9% of the federal budget. This disinvestment would result in devastating cuts to critical services, including K-12 education, Head Start and Early Head Start, child care, and children's health research, including cancer and environmental health initiatives.

Second, investing in children is among the wisest decisions a nation can make. Studies consistently show that early investments in early childhood, education, child care, health care, and family supports yield significant long-term returns in the form of higher earnings, reduced dependence on public assistance, and better health outcomes. Conversely, cutting these programs is both short-sighted and counterproductive, as it undermines the foundation for a strong, productive and healthy future of our society. Simply put, if we want a thriving nation in the future, we must invest in the children who will shape it.

In addition, Mr. Musk, you have particularly highlighted declining birth rates as a significant concern that you have about the future of our nation. One of the key reasons that individuals cite for having fewer children – or not having children at all – is anxiety about the cost of and lack of support for having children.

Programs like Medicaid, child care, Head Start, housing assistance, child nutrition, and child poverty alleviation reduce these pressures, enabling families to provide stable, nurturing environments and supports for their children. Slashing these supports would only exacerbate the very problem that you have sought to address and would discourage families from having children.

Consequently, we urge you to reconsider the consequences of indiscriminately cutting programs based on their authorization status. A program's lack of reauthorization is not an indicator of inefficiency or lack of support. In fact, many unauthorized programs, such as CCDBG, enjoy strong, bipartisan support precisely because they are vital to the well-being of children, families, and the economy. CCDBG received significant funding increases under both the Trump and Biden Administrations in recent years because it provides much-needed child care assistance to over 1.5 million children and their families annually. This funding addresses a need that both sides of the aisle recognize as essential for economic stability and workforce participation. Eliminating programs like the CCDBG, simply because of their "unauthorized" status, would undermine Congressional intent and dismantle lifelines for children and families all across this nation.

As you know, the task of allocating federal funding belongs to Congress and should reflect the priorities of the nation on behalf of American families. As co-leaders of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), you have the opportunity to champion thoughtful and strategic investments, particularly in children, who represent both our greatest responsibility and our greatest opportunity.

I urge you to engage in a more nuanced approach to federal efficiency, one that protects and prioritizes investments in children and families. Slashing these investments may reduce spending in the short term, but the long-term costs to our economy, society, and future would be immense.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. We would be happy to provide additional data and research demonstrating the overwhelming evidence as to the importance of making investments in children.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President, First Focus on Children