

January 26, 2022

Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for your strong leadership on the nation's response to COVID-19. Our COVID Collaborative – an assembly of top experts, leaders and institutions in health, education and business, associations representing the diversity of the country, and networks of families and children who have experienced loss from COVID-19 – has had the privilege of working with your COVID response efforts and extraordinary team since the Presidential transition began in November 2020.

As the country continues to respond to the pandemic, we continue to count the staggering loss. Some of the cruelest pain has been experienced by those with the least capacity to understand and cope with it. As of November 17, 2021, more than 167,000 children – roughly one in 450 of all children in the United States – had lost a parent or other in-home caregiver to COVID-19. More than 70,000 children had been deprived of a parent. Nearly the same number lost a grandparent who lived in the home. At the extreme of this need, more than 13,000 children had lost their *only* in-home caregiver. The loss has disproportionately affected communities of color and other populations least equipped to respond.

We know from decades of study of parental loss that children without the appropriate supports – caregivers, mentors, grief camps, family bereavement programs, social and emotional learning, and deeper mental health supports – are likely to suffer a range of significant and lasting negative effects, such as increased anxiety, depression, substance and alcohol abuse, suicide, lower educational outcomes, and unemployment. By strengthening the system to support these children and families, we will be helping all children and families who have experienced loss.

**We need your leadership. We recommend that you issue an Executive Order charging your departments and agencies to shape a comprehensive response to support these children and families nationally, through states, tribal governments, and localities, drawing on or expanding existing programs and COVID relief funds while respecting tribal sovereignty.** We have briefed your staff on our recommendations included in our [Hidden Pain](#) report, which has generated national interest and support.

COVID-19 has challenged us as a people as seldom before. Now we have a chance to show that America is a single moral community, dedicated to the welfare of children carrying a heavy burden of pain and loss. This is an effort we can undertake as a united country. We experienced the unity of grief; now we must embrace the higher unity of hope and possibility. As our President, someone who has experienced loss in your own family, and who is working to restore the soul of our nation, you are uniquely positioned to lead an effort to bring hope and healing to this generation of children who need our help. We are ready to support you in this historic effort.

Sincerely,

**John Bailey**

Fmr. Special Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, White House  
Fmr. Director of Educational Technology, U.S. Department of Education

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CEO, City Year

**Robert Balfanz**

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