HAVE A HEART INVEST IN KIDS TOOLKIT

Dear Save the Children Action Network (SCAN) Volunteer,

Thank you for your interest in improving the lives of children! If you’re new to SCAN’s work around early childhood education and child nutrition, we welcome you to the team and we look forward to working with you and supporting your efforts! If you’ve been engaged and active in this work already, we really appreciate all that you do—you are the true leaders behind this.

Four years ago, SCAN launched its Have A Heart Campaign around Valentine’s Day focused on the most pressing challenges facing children.

Why Valentine’s Day?
Valentine’s Day provides us with a fun way to tell our lawmakers to “have a heart” by prioritizing early learning and child nutrition programs in their budgets.

As Congress and state legislatures convene, they will have the opportunity to invest in kids. Lawmakers need to hear from you about the importance of investing in early childhood education to help more kids be kindergarten-ready in our states and update child nutrition programs across the country.

IN THIS TOOLKIT, YOU WILL FIND:

1. Information about the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act and Early Learning priorities.

2. How to create your own Valentine’s Day cards and creative ideas from other volunteers

3. How to either deliver your cards in person or through the mail to lawmakers

4. How to amplify your message
We have a federal advocacy ask that everyone around the country can take action on as well as state-focused advocacy asks for those who live in our SCAN states.

**FEDERAL ASK:** Child Nutrition Reauthorization

**STATE-SPECIFIC ASK:** Connect with your SCAN State contact to learn more about what you can do on a state level to create change for child nutrition and early learning priorities! See below!

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THE PROBLEM

COVID-19 Has Made America’s Child Hunger Crisis Worse

- Due to the pandemic in 2020, the number of children living in U.S. households without enough food to support their growth and development has risen from 11 million to 17 million.
- This year, 13 million children may experience hunger, which is above pre-pandemic levels.
- Federal investment has not been sufficient to address this growing hunger crisis, particularly in rural areas.
- In fact, of the counties with the highest percentage of child hunger, 90% of them are rural.
- Additionally, the pandemic has highlighted how important it is to provide flexibility in how nutrition programs are run in order to reach in-need children. A one-size fits-all approach won't work to reach all hungry children.

Hunger Threatens Growth, Development and Success of Kids, Workforce and Economy

- Hungry children are more commonly at-risk of facing long-term issues with their health, behavior and overall development. If a child is not properly nourished early on, their brain development could be significantly affected, as 90% of a child’s brain is developed by age 5.
- Child hunger can result in adults who are not job-ready, often possessing lower educational and technical skills than their more nourished peers, which significantly affects the strength of the nation’s workforce.
- Hunger in America costs over $160 billion annually, adversely impacting the economy.

THE SOLUTION

This year, Congress has the opportunity to update child nutrition programs through a process called the Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR). This reauthorization provides an opportunity to improve and strengthen child nutrition programs so that they better serve the needs of our country’s children, something particularly important in the wake of COVID-19.

Key provisions we are advocating to be included in the CNR are:

- Funding a multi-year investment to modernize Women, Infants and Children (WIC), such as technology investment for telehealth/remote services.
- Expanding access to, and improving efficiencies of, child nutrition assistance programs, such as covering children until they are in kindergarten and reducing paperwork requirements.
- Guaranteeing investment in, and flexibilities for, child nutrition programs during and after the pandemic, including service models flexibilities like home food delivery options.
- Enhancing benefits of federal nutrition programs by allowing full day programs by allowing full day programs to serve an additional meal or snack, in addition to making summer electronic benefits programs (EBT) permanent and nationwide.
THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT IN CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION:

- **Child care in America is unaffordable:** Half of parents say that they can afford $200 or less per week, yet the average cost of high-quality center-based infant care in the U.S. is $2,400 per month.

- **There is a lack of supply of child care:** An estimated one third of parents with young children lack access to child care options in their communities.

- **Lack of child care is a barrier to work:** 57% of parents said child care responsibilities had impacted their ability to work over the last month. A July 2021 study found that a lack of access to child care was the number one reason that unemployed Americans turned down a job offer.

- **Investments in child care leads to significant economic benefits:** Through enabling parents (especially women) to work and creating jobs for child care providers, one estimate suggests that significant investments in child care could translate into $220 billion in new economic activity.

- **Investing in early education leads to long term benefits for children:** Nobel winning economist James Heckman estimated that early education yields a 13% annual return on investment through better education, economic, health, and social outcomes for children who received high-quality early childhood program.
MAKING VALENTINES

You can incorporate valentine-making into an existing student club or community action team meeting, host a stand-alone event or write them by yourself at home. It's up to you! Remember, if you are writing to members of Congress, you will typically write three cards: two to your U.S. senators and one to your representative. Not sure who represents you? You can look it up at https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members.

There are several ways you can prepare your valentines, including:

- **Using our pre-printed postcards**: SCAN has created postcards with a Valentine’s Day message. The back is blank for you to write a note to your lawmaker. See our sample messages on the next page for what you can write to your lawmakers.

- **Making your own valentines**: You can create your own valentines with some simple materials like paper and markers.

- **Get creative with it!** Use your own creativity to amplify your Valentine’s Day card. Here are some pictures from our volunteers across the country:
Sample Postcard Message
Note: The sample message below was drafted with congressional lawmakers in mind. If you are focusing on state lawmakers, connect with your SCAN staff member about which programs to highlight for your state.

“Dear [lawmaker name] –
Please improve and strengthen child nutrition programs so that they better serve the needs of our country’s children, something particularly important in the wake of COVID-19, by passing the Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR).

I hope you’ll have a heart and invest in kids!

Sincerely,
[your name and address]

Sample Messages for Handmade Valentines

❤ Have a heart and invest in kids!

❤ Don’t break my heart – invest in kids

❤ Be mine. Invest in kids!

❤ Roses are red. Violets are blue. Invest in kids, and voters will love you!

Who to send your Valentines to?

Depending on your state, you may be focusing on members of Congress or on your state lawmakers – or both! Talk with your Save the Children Action Network (SCAN) staff contact to determine which lawmakers you’ll be focusing on. Then use this toolkit to create some fun Valentine’s cards and plan your deliveries— all while being safe during the pandemic!
Below are some ideas for delivering or mailing your valentines. No matter how you deliver your valentines messages, be sure to stage a great photo. We’ll use these photos on social media and share them with lawmakers’ offices. Check out our tips for taking a good photo.

Please be sure to put your safety and those of your fellow SCAN advocates first when planning your deliveries. Also, coordinate with your SCAN staff contact about delivering or mailing your valentines to ensure coordination.

**In-person delivery:**

- Send only one or two people max for the delivery. If you send more than one person, they should practice social distancing and wear masks. You should also call the lawmaker’s office in advance to coordinate on safety protocols related to delivering the valentines.
- Wear your SCAN t-shirt and make sure it’s visible in the photo.
- Be polite to the staff when dropping off the cards. Let them know that you want the lawmaker to prioritize funding for child nutrition programs and programs that help more children access high-quality early childhood education.
- Make sure the valentines are visible in the photo. Consider taking a close-up photo of some of your favorites. Take a great photo!
- After the delivery, post your favorite photo on social media. You can tweet a photo at the lawmaker to whom you delivered the valentines or post your photo on Facebook or Instagram tagging the lawmaker. Be sure to use the hashtags #HaveAHeart and #InvestInKids in your posts.

**Amplify Your Valentine Messages**

Once your valentine is done, grab your SCAN t-shirt and take a quick photo or video. You can then plan to share that on social media, tagging your lawmakers. Use the hashtags #HaveAHeart and #InvestInKids in your posts.

**Sample:** Check out these special valentines I created for @SenBoWatson! Senator, we at @SCActionNetwork urge you to #HaveAHeart and #InvestInKids this Valentine’s Day.