



Southern Poverty Law Center
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April 21, 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 healthy communities throughout the South. As you consider appropriations for FY 2024, we urge you to fund the agencies highlighted below to strengthen their ability to protect 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 other 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 and healthcare, employment, voting, police accountability, youth incarceration, and combatting hate and extremism. This insight informs our recommendations for the FY24 appropriations cycle. We understand the constraints and realities of the federal appropriations process and the many, varied needs Congress must address in the coming months. However, we believe sustained investments in the programs outlined below are impactful and cost-effective methods to assist the communities in the South in need.

Commerce, Justice, Science, Elections, and Related Agencies

1. Strengthening Democracy and Voting Access

The last few years have seen our democratic system face extraordinary pressures and unprecedented threats. This has included a renewed commitment by many in power, particularly



in the Deep South, to pass voter suppression laws that target the most marginalized of communities. More than 3,600 bills to change voting and election laws have been introduced in state houses since 2020 – and at least 368 of them have been adopted.¹ These efforts purposely target and disproportionately suppress the vote for communities of color. Analyses have found that the effects of restrictive voting laws already passed in southern states like Arizona, Georgia, and Texas fall especially hard on voters of color.

Despite the efforts by some to try to take us backwards, our democratic institutions have continued to hold up thanks to the countless election administrators and workers working tirelessly to protect the freedom to vote and ensure our elections are safe, secure, and transparent. This proposed election assistance funding will provide them the crucial investment they need to continue to do their vital work of protecting our democracy and the freedom to vote, while the additional funding for the DOJ's Civil Rights Division will help fight back against any state-level legislative efforts that violate the National Voter Registration Act and Voting Rights Act. We urge the Committee to appropriate funding to support and defend free and fair elections in this country at the levels listed below.

- \$5 billion in new election assistance funding to the Election Assistance Commission.
- \$8 million to support the Department of Justice's enforcement of federal voting laws to ensure access to the ballot box, particularly for communities of color.

2. Improving Hate Crime Response

The FBI released updated 2021 hate crime data on March 13.² The new data documented the highest number of hate crimes since the FBI data collection program began in 1991. Race-based crimes – primarily crimes directed against Black and African American persons, were, as always, the most numerous, and this year's data documented record number of crimes against Hispanics, the LGBTQ communities, and the AAPI communities. Unfortunately, hate crime reporting is voluntary for state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies, and many agencies do not provide information. Accurate measurement of this national problem is essential for crafting effective responses. We urge the Committee 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).

¹ Voting Rights Lab, THE STATE OF STATE ELECTION LAW SINCE 2020 VOTING RIGHTS LAB (2023), <https://votingrightslab.org/the-state-of-state-election-law-since-2020/> (last visited Mar 27, 2023).

² FBI, *Supplemental Hate Crime Statistics, 2021* <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/hate-crime>, March 13, 2023.

- \$30 million for Community-based approaches to prevent and address hate crimes, as authorized by the FY2022 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations law. These grants should be focused on building community resilience to hate violence, supporting local initiatives to promote intergroup relations and de-escalation training to address community tensions.
- \$4 million for grants to State and local law enforcement agencies 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, funding 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.

2. 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 Terrorism – a commitment to confront long-term contributors to 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.

3. Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act – Title II and V and Sentencing Alternatives for Caregivers

Louisiana is currently incarcerating young people in Angola Penitentiary, a notoriously dangerous adult prison. 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. Increases in Title V funding will help youth at the local level remain free from the juvenile legal system.

- \$350 million to Title II and Title V for the full implementation of the JJDP.
- \$250 million to carry out programs under the Charles Grassley Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Program, Title II of the JJDP, of which not more than 5% goes to provide training and technical assistance to states; and not more than 10% goes to support research by OJJDP.
- \$100 million to carry out programs under the Incentive Youth Promise Grants for Local Delinquency Prevention Programs Act of 2018, of which \$30 million goes to support Tribal Youth Program, Delinquency Prevention Program. Title II of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, as authorized by the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018; of which not more than 5% goes to provide training and technical assistance to states; and not more than 10% goes to support research conducted by OJJDP.
- \$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.

Labor, Health and Human Services, Education

In response to increased incarceration and criminalization throughout the Deep South, we urge the Committee to support increased investments in the crisis response continuum, re-entry support programs for formerly incarcerated individuals, and violence intervention programs.

- \$100 million for mobile crisis response through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which matches the President’s Budget request for these innovative programs. 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.
- \$170 million for the Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) program at the Department of Labor’s Employment & Training Administration in the final FY24 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. The REO program provides workforce development and reentry services for individuals, including young people, with a criminal legal history.
- \$250 million for the Community Violence Intervention Initiative, which matches the President’s Budget request. This program supports community-based organizations in cities, demonstrating the greatest need as they implement proven public health strategies that reduce violence.

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 qualify for the Child Tax Credit or only receive a partial credit under the current program.³ During the expanded Child Tax Credit, child poverty decreased by 40% in Maine.⁴ Currently, an estimated 49,000 children in Maine⁵ and 2.1 million children in Texas⁶ are excluded from the full tax credit. We support the President's FY24 Budget, which expands the Child Tax Credit to these 19 million children and will reduce child poverty in the United States.

- \$22.1 billion for HHS's existing early care and education programs. This would include \$9 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant to expand access to quality, affordable childcare for families across the country.
- \$13.1 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 the Committee resist any effort to increase barriers to access these funds.

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies

We support the President's FY24 Budget request to increase the Department of Housing and Urban Development's budget by \$1.1 billion to \$73.3 billion, representing a 1.6% increase. There is currently a national shortage of seven million affordable homes.⁷ Federal investments in affordable housing and homeless assistance programs benefit the lowest-income households and help individuals and families avoid eviction and homelessness.

- \$1.6 billion to provide funding for the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, which helps states and localities build and rehabilitate affordable housing.
- \$32.7 billion for the Housing Choice Vouchers program which helps 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.
- \$3.7 billion for Homeless Assistance Grants, which would provide aid to an additional 25,000 households.

³ By Chuck Marr et al., Year-end tax policy priority: Expand the Child Tax Credit for the 19 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> (last visited Mar 27, 2023).

⁴ Norah Hogan, Advocates in Maine push for Child Tax Credit expansion WMTW (2023), <https://www.wmtw.com/article/advocates-in-maine-push-for-child-tax-credit-expansion/43277446> (last visited Mar 30, 2023).

⁵ Id.

⁶ By Chuck Marr et al., Year-end tax policy priority: Expand the Child Tax Credit for the 19 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> (last visited Mar 27, 2023).

⁷ President Biden to unveil FY24 budget request this week, NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION (2023), <https://nlihc.org/resource/president-biden-unveil-fy24-budget-request-week> (last visited Mar 27, 2023).

- \$3 billion in competitive grants to states and localities to prevent evictions by offering access to legal counsel and providing rental assistance.

Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration

A ‘hunger cliff’ is looming as states cut food stamp benefits affecting nearly 30 million Americans. Residents in Louisiana and Alabama will lose at least \$95 a month as SNAP temporary pandemic benefits end.⁸ We urge the Committee to resist any effort to cut SNAP and WIC benefits during this time of high inflation. Additionally, we strongly oppose any attempt to place additional requirements in order to access these critical benefits for struggling families.

- \$122.1 billion for the SNAP and \$6.3 billion for the Women, Infants, and Children (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 the Committee 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 request a reduction in the funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The President’s Budget includes \$16.9 billion for CBP, an 8.2 percent decrease, and 8.3 billion for ICE, a 4.9 percent decrease from current spending levels. We specifically request a reduction of ICE’s funding devoted to immigrant detention. Those funds should instead be redirected to community-based alternatives, such as support for asylum-seekers and their families.
- We urge the Committee not to include the Administration’s request for \$4.7 billion for a new Southwest Border Contingency Fund. The proposed Contingency Fund would automatically replenish if the set number of supposed ‘encounters’ with border crossers is exceeded at the end of every quarter of the fiscal year. The Administration’s budget request does not explain where these funds would come from, nor does it set an amount for replenishment. We strenuously object to the creation of a potentially very expensive slush fund, with little oversight or details about how these programs will be administered.

⁸ | By Dottie Rosenbaum et al., TEMPORARY PANDEMIC SNAP BENEFITS WILL END IN REMAINING 35 STATES IN MARCH 2023 CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES (2023), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/temporary-pandemic-snap-benefits-will-end-in-remaining-35-states-in-march> (last visited Mar 27, 2023).



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, Voting Rights; Michael Lieberman Michael.Lieberman@splcenter.org Senior Policy Counsel, Hate & Extremism; Lisa Borden Lisa.Borden@splcenter.org Senior Policy Counsel, International Advocacy; Nina Patel Nina.Patel@splcenter.org Senior Policy Counsel, Decarceration and Criminal Legal System Reform

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