

A photograph of a family of four (a man, a woman, and two children) running along a beach at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and long shadows on the sand. The family is running from left to right, with the man and woman holding hands with the children.

IT'S TIME FOR A **NATIONAL** **COMMISSION**

on Children and Families for the 21st Century

CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE ON
SUPPORTS FOR WORKING FAMILIES
AUGUST 2025

CONVERGENCE



About the Collaborative

The *Convergence Collaborative on Supports for Working Families* met regularly from 2023 through 2025. We are a cross-partisan, cross-sector group of leaders who have dedicated our careers to improving the lives of children and families in America. To our knowledge, we are the most ideologically and sectorally diverse group to address family policy that has convened in recent decades. We came together against a backdrop of historic polarization and political divides.

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A Note from the Director



We are living in interesting times. Our country remains deeply politically divided. This makes it harder than usual to address thorny and complex challenges.

One such set of challenges is the outlook facing America's children. On numerous accounts — from declining literacy rates and rising chronic health conditions among children to rapidly evolving technology and declining family formation — our kids face an uncertain future.

We can help shape that future for the better with evidence-based insight, cooperation, and collaboration across our differences. I believe that the best mechanism to do so is the creation of a cross-partisan, cross-organizational body that can consider all these varied challenges at once and put forward a set of recommendations to Congress

The politically diverse members of our *Convergence Collaborative on Supports for Working Families* agree. What follows is our proposal to reinstate a National Commission on Children and Families for the 21st century.

Abby McCloskey

Director, Convergence Collaborative on Supports for Working Families
Founder, McCloskey Policy LLC

INTRODUCTION

On July 4th, 1991, the Washington Post ran a story with the headline: “PLIGHT OF CHILDREN: SEEN BUT UNHEEDED.” The article said:

“Dissonance between rising concern and stagnant policy has bedeviled child advocacy groups for the past decade and now seems poised — with the flurry of media attention triggered by a report last month of the National Commission on Children — to move toward the center of the national political stage.”

The National Commission on Children was signed into law by President Reagan in 1987. It was a cross-partisan, cross-industry commission designed to ‘serve as a forum on behalf of the children of the Nation.’ It has been thirty years since the commission disbanded. Almost everything has changed.

Many challenges identified by the commission, such as the high rates of teenage pregnancy, child poverty, and drug use by teens, have been reduced. Other new challenges, such as mental health, social media, obesity, falling fertility rates, and gun violence, have worsened or emerged. Still other challenges — from family breakdown and supporting working parents of young children, to improving maternal and child health and education outcomes — continue to bedevil policymakers, communities, and families alike.

Given the wide range of challenges facing today’s families and the importance of flourishing families and children our future, we believe that it is time to create a National Commission on Children and Families for the 21st Century.



Given the wide range of challenges facing today’s families, the importance of flourishing families and children for the future, and our divided political environment, we believe that it is time to create a National Commission on Children and Families for the 21st Century.

-Convergence Collaborative on Supports for Working Families



PURPOSE AND EFFICACY

A new commission — unlike the previous one — should have an explicit goal to guide its efforts. We believe that “identifying actions to improve the flourishing of children and families in America” should be its North Star. The language of flourishing, which we build out in our own cross-partisan group’s report, is uniquely powerful because it encompasses *and* goes beyond economic concerns, addressing more holistic issues such as community and belonging, agency and opportunity, and optimism and hope about the future.

For those wary of a commission’s effectiveness, they should be heartened to know of the successes of the last commission on children. The commission’s report, *Beyond Rhetoric*, was released in 1991 and included policy ideas such as a new Child Tax Credit, which would become law later that decade. The Child Tax Credit remains a widely popular bipartisan policy today.

A commission provides the opportunity to help bridge political divides and find consensus. It provides an opportunity to comprehensively address issues that tend to be siloed, aka pulling children’s nutrition, social media impact on children, prenatal care, workplace policies, and tax policy for families into one discussion. Last but not least, a commission draws much needed public attention to issues that are often shortchanged in policy discussions.

STRUCTURE

We believe that the structure for a new Commission on Children and Families should largely resemble the last one. Members should be selected by Congress and the Administration from across the country and include a diverse mix of local, state, and federal policymakers; private and nonprofit providers serving children and parents; advocates for children and families; academics and think tank experts; and parents and representatives of parent organizations. This go-around, it should be explicit that members are evenly split between those identifying as Republicans and Democrats.

A new commission, like the former one, should be temporary, with a legislated start and end date to avoid creating a new, permanent government entity. Commission members are not to be compensated. The commission should be required to hold at least four in-person meetings as well as listening sessions with stakeholders around the country, in urban, rural, and suburban locations. It should deliver an interim and final report to the Administration and to Congress.

Likewise, we believe that the five core issues addressed by the first commission (in italics) remain a good starting point for such a commission today, with the specifics updated for our current moment. These include:

- 1 ***Questions relating to the health of children and parents***, including but not limited to infant and maternal mortality, nutrition and obesity, mental health and social media, family planning, prenatal and postpartum care, and Medicaid.
- 2 ***Questions relating to social and support services for children and their parents***, including but not limited to how to strengthen marriage and the family unit, as well as how to increase and improve parents' child care choices and the quality of care, whether parental care, home-, faith-, or center-based.
- 3 ***Questions relating to education***, including how to improve academic outcomes in K-12 and assess the roles of public education, vouchers, charter schools, Head Start, and block grants to states in contributing to child development and supporting family involvement.
- 4 ***Questions relating to income security***, including but not limited to cash assistance, in-kind benefits, improved work opportunities, workplace training, wages for parents, and the general economic environment.
- 5 ***Questions relating to tax policy***, including but not limited to reviewing existing tax credits, understanding the impact of tax policy on family formation and work, and evaluating where children's programs can be sustained amid a historically high budget deficit.

Beyond these five core areas identified by the 1991 commission, the prior commission also examined public-private partnerships as well as the efficacy of data gathering efforts at the federal level, which we support.

Additionally, we believe it would make sense for a new commission to explore how government services are provided across local, state, and federal governments and among agencies, in search of a more effective structuring of existing government programs.

CONCLUSION

We believe it's time for children and families to once again move to the center of the national political stage — and for America to be a nation where children and families flourish. A National Commission on Children and Families in the 21st century is an important step in that direction.

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The following people generously gave their time and energy to the Collaborative. Importantly, their participation in our discussions and contributions to this report are not reflective of any of their organizations' positions.

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About Convergence

Convergence is the leading organization bridging divides to solve critical challenges through collaborative problem solving across ideological, political, and cultural lines. For more than a decade, Convergence has brought together leaders, doers, and experts to build trusting relationships, identify breakthrough solutions, and form unlikely alliances for constructive change on seemingly intractable issues. Our process is improving the lives of Americans and strengthening democracy for a more resilient and collaborative future.

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