June 17, 2015—KIND is deeply disappointed that Senate Republicans failed to support the President’s fiscal year 2016 budget request for $50 million for legal representation of unaccompanied children and child victims of mistreatment, exploitation, and trafficking in the 2016 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies funding bill. The President had requested the funding to promote innovations, including leveraging federal funds to bolster pro bono representation, and to improve the level and quality of legal representation for vulnerable populations.

This funding is vital to address the unprecedented legal needs of unaccompanied children in the United States that has resulted from their increased numbers in recent years. The number of these children has dramatically risen from an average of 6-8,000 through FY2011, to more than 60,000 in FY2014.

Over 70 percent are unrepresented in their removal proceedings; without counsel, it nearly impossible for these children—who range in age from toddlers to teenagers—to present their case to an immigration judge or to counter a government attorney who is arguing for the child’s deportation. Immigration proceedings are adversarial and children are required to meet the same procedural, evidentiary, and legal rules as adults. As result, many unaccompanied children can be ordered returned to their home country to the same situations in which they faced great harm, and that caused them to flee in the first place.

KIND recognizes and appreciates Vice Chairwoman Senator Mikulski attempt to restore the funding through an amendment she offered, which failed, 16-14, along party lines.

KIND is pleased, however, that the Senate Appropriations Committee did support the President’s budget request of $60,000,000 for 55 immigration judge teams. This funding, if enacted, will help the immigration courts deal with caseloads and the backlog.