

EDITOR, NEWS DESK

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BUDGET 2026 MUST PUT CHILDREN FIRST

KUALA LUMPUR (3 OCTOBER 2025) The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC), SUHAKAM urges the Government of Malaysia to ensure that Budget 2026 adopts a child-first approach, where allocations are directed towards the survival, protection, development, and participation of children. In line with Malaysia's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the national budget must provide concrete investments that safeguard children's rights and secure the country's future.

A strong commitment is required to strengthen the Safe School initiative. This involves allocating sufficient resources to repair and upgrade ageing facilities and learning tools, ensuring that schools nationwide meet safety standards, as well as funding anti-bullying advocacy efforts. Schools must also provide a safe environment for mental and emotional well-being. Budget 2026 should therefore expand investment in mental health services for children by ensuring that more school counsellors and psychologists are placed in high-need areas, accessible mental health hotlines are available for young people, and awareness programmes are developed for parents, teachers, and students to reduce stigma and build a culture of care.

The protection of children from violence, abuse, exploitation, and harmful practices must also be a budgetary priority. More resources are needed for child protection officers, social workers, children's shelters, and preventive programmes that address violence against children. Equally important is the strengthening of child protection services and resources to fully implement the Child Act 2001 (Act 611), which is long overdue. Without proper funding for protection, children remain vulnerable to harms that undermine their rights and dignity.

Equally urgent is the need to end child poverty and support disadvantaged families. Poverty continues to harm children's education, health, and future opportunities. Budget 2026 should enhance social protection for children by increasing cash assistance to low-income families and expanding access to nutritious school meals for those in need.

Finally, children's health and nutrition demand greater investment. Budget 2026 should strengthen nutrition programmes for young children, support school-based health services, and expand primary healthcare facilities in underserved areas. Addressing malnutrition and obesity, together with preventive health measures, will help Malaysia build a healthier generation capable of reaching their full potential.

In conclusion, OCC emphasises that Budget 2026 should serve as an opportunity for Malaysia to demonstrate its sincere commitment to children. Every ringgit allocated to children is an investment in building a stronger, safer, and more resilient Malaysia. Investment in children must be the nation's highest priority.

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**The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC)
Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)
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