

Chile's Social Development Minister Toro Challenges Kast's US\$6 Billion Spending Cut: «Debate with Clear Data, Not Myths»

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In an interview on La Mañana, Social Development Minister Javiera Toro warned that José Antonio Kast's proposed US\$6 billion fiscal cut amounts to nearly four times her ministry's budget and would jeopardize core social programs, urging an evidence-based debate with clear data.



Chile's Minister of Social Development and Family, Javiera Toro, on Thursday addressed the proposal to cut US\$6 billion in public spending, put forward by Republican Party presidential candidate José Antonio Kast, and stressed that any discussion must be based on «clear data, not myths.»

«Social protection must not be weakened. That is why we call for a public discussion grounded in information, with clear data—not myths—because US\$6 billion is nearly four times the budget of the Ministry of Social Development. I don't know anyone in Chile who would say the Ministry of Social Development does not perform a role that is essential for society, especially for the most vulnerable families, in a country that still faces persistently high inequality we need to address,» the minister said in an interview with La Mañana, hosted by El Ciudadano's director, Javier Pineda Olcay.

Toro said she is concerned by the idea of a US\$6 billion fiscal cut, warning it would impact «virtually everything the Ministry of Social Development does—child protection, services for older adults and people with disabilities, and the broad spectrum of caregiving work,» among other areas.

«That is why it doesn't appear to be a discussion backed by real data,» she added.

In her view, efficiency can and should improve. She noted that the Ministry of Social Development's 2026 budget framework is «quite constrained, with very limited growth; yet even so, it includes significant increases, primarily for children and care.»

«You can set budget priorities, recognize urgent social needs, and still make improvements,» she emphasized.

She highlighted two initiatives the Ministry of Social Development presented on Wednesday to the Joint Budget Subcommittee.

«Elige Vivir Sano has a micro food bank initiative, and the Social Solidarity and Investment Fund (FOSIS) runs a solidarity markets program. Both aim to rescue and reuse food in good condition that would otherwise go to waste. For 2026, we plan to combine these programs and implement the initiatives within FOSIS. It's a concrete example of how we can review public offerings, make them more coordinated and efficient—without rolling back social policy,» she explained.

«That constant effort is the Government's stance, and there are also policy definitions that have been made and are crystal clear,» she added.

2026 Budget and the importance of «safeguarding social programs»

Asked which policies or programs might face more resistance during congressional debate on the 2026 Budget Bill, Minister Toro said the opening session of the mixed committee showed the discussion centered on «safeguarding social programs.»

«That's why you often see a big gap between broad statements about fiscal policy and the concrete decisions that have to be made—because it's difficult to oppose the Ministry's specific social programs. So I hope those objections don't arise,» she said.

«Last year, the entire Chile Crece Contigo allocation was rejected—the entire program was voted down. We do see risks in the parliamentary process. There was no way to justify that decision, and it was later reversed, but sometimes political differences play out that way. It's also very important to remember that every position represented in Congress stands for real people in society,» she noted.

The minister stressed that the national push to expand the care system has been backed by lawmakers from all political sectors across their districts.

«At the openings of community care centers, we see broad participation from across the political spectrum, which is very positive. Mayors from both the governing coalition and the opposition support these programs. If those same political actors later refused to back the National Support and Care System bill in Congress, it would be quite incomprehensible,» she argued.

The University of Chile-trained lawyer noted that while there have been contradictions from some political sectors in the past, strong social organization—such as the caregivers' movement—has ensured sufficient public attention, allowing the bill to move forward with a broad majority.

«I hope it can be approved in the coming months—this year—because it would be hard to explain otherwise, when lawmakers themselves tell their constituents it's important to advance a care system. That coherence matters for democracy,» she added.

How much does it cost to raise a child in Chile?

At the end of September, the Ministry of Women and Gender Equity—supported by UNICEF, the Ministry of Social Development and Family, the Ministry of Economy, and the National Statistics Institute (INE)—presented the Care Basket (Canasta de Crianza), the first national study to estimate the economic cost of raising children and adolescents in Chile. The analysis factors in out-of-pocket spending on goods and services, as well as the value of unpaid care time that families—primarily women—devote to their children.

On the study's development, Minister Toro emphasized that her ministry's approach «puts care at the center of what this government is doing.»

«The study relies mainly on two state surveys: the Household Budget Survey and the National Time-Use Survey. The latter hadn't been conducted since 2015; we updated it in 2023. Using both, the study estimates averages—you can drill down by household composition and children's ages—but on average, the care basket for a child or adolescent is around 595,000 pesos. That total combines direct monetary costs for goods and services with the value of the time required for caregiving,» she explained on La Mañana.

Consolidating the National Support and Care System

To continue elevating the value of care, she said, President Gabriel Boric's administration has promoted the consolidation of the National Support and Care System, «which essentially seeks to ensure that care—for children and adolescents, people with disabilities, people who are

dependent, and older adults□Dis no longer only an individual family responsibility, which historically has fallen disproportionately on women.»

«During our administration we have put care at the center and recognized it as work. We created a caregiver credential, which already identifies more than 229,000 people□Dthough the real number is surely at least triple that. We are also legislating so this doesn19t depend on a single government. That is a major priority for us,» she said.

Toro referred to the bill□Dcurrently being debated in Congress□Dthat recognizes the right to care and establishes the National Support and Care System, aiming to ensure that «everything advanced under this government does not backslide and continues to deepen.»

«The progress□Dsomething I say with pride□Dhas been substantial, but when you look at the scale of the need, there is still a long way to go, and that work must continue under the next government,» she stressed.

In Thursday19s edition of La MaF1anera, October 9, our director interviewed lawyer Esteban Serey, an expert in the right to housing.

You can watch the full program below: