

September 9, 2009

The Honorable Secretary Kathleen Sebelius
United States Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

The Child Care and Early Learning Coalition greatly appreciates that the Administration has recognized that early care and education creates jobs today and builds a strong workforce for the future by including investments in this critical area in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. As you prepare your budget request for fiscal year 2011, we urge you to build on those investments in early care and education with funding levels that maintain the ARRA funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start, and Early Head Start and allow for substantial increases in these programs beyond the ARRA funding. Investing in these two programs will:

- Allow more children and families to benefit from these vital programs and support significant improvements in a long overdue CCDBG reauthorization;
- Help Head Start programs meet the new requirements of the Head Start Act of 2007; and
- Provide resources to programs to assist them in moving toward higher quality standards as envisioned in the Early Learning Challenge Fund.

When America supports child care, Head Start, and Early Head Start, we encourage children, families, and our nation to reach their full potential. In these challenging economic times, it is particularly important to help families afford stable child care, which can help parents get and keep a job. ARRA funds have made a difference. Due to the additional CCDBG funding provided by the ARRA, Arizona prevented 15,000 children from losing their child care assistance. Alabama was able to maintain support for 3,000 children who were about to lose child care assistance. Maine and Florida are able to provide child care assistance for some of the children on their waiting lists. States are also using the additional CCDBG funds to move toward higher-quality child care by piloting quality rating and improvement systems, expanding networks that support infant and toddler providers, and developing innovative efforts to enhance child care providers' and teachers' skills and knowledge. Meanwhile, the ARRA funds available for Head Start and Early Head Start expansion are indispensable to many local communities that need the comprehensive early childhood services these programs offer, as indicated by the large number of applicants for the funds.

While the increase in CCDBG funds included in the ARRA is helping states address some of the immediate needs created by the economic downturn, it will not adequately address the

significant, long-standing gaps in the affordability and quality of our child care system. If ARRA funds are not maintained, many families will likely lose the child care assistance that enables parents to work. If more low-income children are to have the opportunity to participate in the high-quality child care and early learning experiences they need, additional discretionary and mandatory funding increases are also critical.

Building on ARRA funding for Head Start and Early Head Start is essential as well. These programs are unique because of the comprehensive support they offer to the most disadvantaged families and children. Over the past eight years, as funding failed to keep pace with rising costs, many programs were forced to make cuts in areas such as staffing, training, and transportation. Flat funding also meant that Head Start was able to serve only about half of the eligible preschool-age children and Early Head Start was able to serve less than three percent of eligible infants and toddlers. The investments from the ARRA will help many Head Start and Early Head Start programs to restore their services to previous levels, but programs are still struggling to make the improvements required by the 2007 bipartisan Head Start reauthorization. Maintaining the ARRA funding for Head Start and Early Head Start in the fiscal year 2011 budget, together with the additional funding, will help these programs to achieve the goals of the reauthorization. In addition, programs will be able to reach more children birth to age five who could benefit from a comprehensive early learning experience yet currently do not have the opportunity to participate.

Families are under financial strains that grow by the day. The number of young children living in poverty continues to increase. Maintaining the ARRA funding and making additional investments will help sustain and strengthen child care, Head Start, and Early Head Start programs so they can serve the growing number of families who need affordable, high-quality early learning options for their children. We look forward to a budget for fiscal year 2011 that will provide the substantial investments in early care and education that children, families, and communities sorely need.

Sincerely,

Afterschool Alliance
Alliance for Early Childhood Finance
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Psychological Association
Center for Community Self-Help
Center for Law and Social Policy
Cherokee Nation
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Investment Fund
Council for Professional Recognition
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
Early Care and Education Consortium

Early Childhood Policy Research
Easter Seals
First Children's Finance
First Five Years Fund
Generations United
IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association
Insight Center for Community Economic Development
Low Income Investment Fund
MomsRising
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Association for Regulatory Administration
National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies
National Association of School Psychologists
National Council of Jewish Women
National Black Child Development Institute
National Council of La Raza
National Head Start Association
National Indian Child Care Association
National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association
National Organization for Women
National PTA
National Women's Law Center
Nonprofit Finance Fund
RESULTS/RESULTS Educational Fund
Service Employees International Union
The Arc of the United States
United Cerebral Palsy
Women of Reform Judaism
YMCA of the USA
YWCA USA
Zero to Three