

March 1, 2010

Dear Senator/Representative:

The Child Care and Early Learning Coalition urges the Budget Committee to adopt the President's FY 2011 budget proposals for key early childhood programs, including a \$1.6 billion increase for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, a \$989 million increase for Head Start and Early Head Start, and a \$1 billion increase for child nutrition programs. These programs are vital supports for children who need high-quality early learning experiences that promote their successful development and for parents working to support their children and families. When America supports child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, and child nutrition programs, we encourage children, families, and our nation to reach their full potential.

A \$1.6 billion increase for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) would fund child care assistance for 235,000 children who would otherwise not receive help. It would also support a reauthorization of the program that would increase families' access to high-quality early learning options that meet their needs by encouraging the establishment of a high standard of quality across child care settings, expansion of professional development opportunities for the child care workforce, and coordination among early childhood education programs.

In these challenging economic times, the CCDBG is particularly important to help families afford stable child care, which enables parents get and keep a job. Yet, due to funding that remained stagnant until recently, there are significant, longstanding gaps in the affordability and quality of our child care system. For example, only about one in seven children eligible for federal child care assistance currently receive help. In 2009, only nine states had reimbursement rates for providers who serve families receiving child care assistance at the federally recommended level compared to twenty-two states in 2001.

The additional CCDBG funding provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act demonstrates the difference that increased investments can make for children and families. 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. A number of other states were able to provide child care assistance for some of the children on their waiting lists for assistance. States are also using the additional CCDBG funds to move toward higher-quality child care by piloting quality rating and improvement systems, expand networks that support infant and toddler

care providers, and develop innovative efforts to enhance child care providers' and teachers' skills and knowledge.

In order to help more middle-income families with the high costs of child care, we urge you to include the funding necessary to support the Administration's proposal to expand the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit and to also cover the costs involved in making the credit refundable.

A \$989 million increase for Head Start and Early Head Start would enable Head Start to provide comprehensive, high-quality early learning opportunities to an estimated 971,000 preschool-age children, an increase of approximately 66,500 children over FY 2008, and would enable Early Head Start to offer similar opportunities to approximately 116,000 infants and toddlers, nearly twice as many as were served in FY 2008. This allows for the increased number of Head Start and Early Head Start children funded by ARRA to continue and for continued improvements in the quality of the programs.

Increasing funding for Head Start and Early Head Start is essential because of the unique supports they offer to the most disadvantaged families and children. It is particularly important given that, for 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 40 percent of eligible preschool-age children and Early Head Start was able to serve less than three percent of eligible infants and toddlers. Increased funding will help these programs to reach more children as the number living in poverty rises as well as make the improvements required by the 2007 bipartisan Head Start reauthorization.

A \$1 billion increase for child nutrition programs, including the Child and Adult Care Food Program, will allow for program improvements that will help to improve childhood nutrition, reduce childhood overweight and obesity, reduce hunger, and enhance child development and school readiness. These improvements are necessary to address existing gaps in child nutrition programs. For example, under the current system, more than half of the nation's child care centers and family child care homes operate without CACFP support for healthy meals. Family child care homes' participation in CACFP, which had been one of the fastest growing nutrition programs, has dropped nearly 30 percent since the introduction of a complex two-tiered reimbursement system in 1997.

We also encourage you to increase investments in IDEA Section 619 and Part C for infants and toddlers to ensure that our youngest children with disabilities and special needs also get a strong start.

Increased investments in early childhood programs are essential today to help the many families grappling with financial and other strains in the current economy and to help the growing number of children living in poverty. By following the Administration's budget recommendations for child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, and child nutrition programs as well as increasing funding for Section 619 and Part C, the Budget Committee can help see to it that these important programs are able to reach more

children and families in need of support while also strengthening and enhancing the effectiveness of these programs.

Sincerely,

Afterschool Alliance

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

American Federation of Teachers

Children's Defense Fund

Child Welfare League of America

CLASP

Council for Exceptional Children

Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC)

Early Care and Education Consortium

Easter Seals

First Children's Finance

First Five Years Fund

First Focus Campaign for Children

IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA)

Local Initiatives Support Corporation

MomsRising

National Association for the Education of Young Children

National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies

National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS-SDE)

National Children's Facilities Network

National Council of Jewish Women

National Black Child Development Institute

National Head Start Association

National Indian Child Care Association

National Organization for Women

National PTA

National Women's Law Center

Nonprofit Finance Fund

RESULTS

Service Employees International Union

Voices for America's Children

YMCA of the USA

YWCA USA

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