

April 15, 2010

Dear President Obama and Secretaries Duncan/Sebelius/Vilsack:

The Child Care and Early Learning Coalition welcomes the Administration's recognition of the importance of the early years and its strong commitment to investing in young children and their families. We urge you to continue your efforts on behalf of young children by ensuring that this Congress makes early childhood a top priority. With the support of the Administration and Congress, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start and Early Head Start, and child nutrition programs, particularly the Child and Adult Care Food program (CACFP), will receive the investments they need to help children, families, and our nation to reach their full potential and allow the Administration to meet its early childhood education goals.

We ask that you work with the appropriate congressional committees to enact the \$1.6 billion increase for CCDBG recommended in the President's budget and to reauthorize CCDBG and use the reauthorization as an opportunity to strengthen the program's provisions on health and safety standards for child care, families' access to child care assistance, and support for high-quality care, particularly infant/toddler care. In these challenging economic times, CCDBG is particularly important to help families afford stable child care, which enables parents to get and keep a job.

The additional CCDBG funding provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) demonstrates the difference that increased investments can make for children and families. Arizona prevented 9,230 children from losing their child care assistance each month from February to December 2009. Alabama prevented 3,000 children from losing their child care assistance. Georgia is working toward clearing its waiting list and in August 2009 began serving 5,000 to 8,000 additional children per month. New Jersey had removed more than 3,000 children from its waiting list as of January 2010.

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 care providers, and developing innovative efforts to enhance child care providers' and teachers' skill and knowledge.

We also ask you to ensure that Congress provides the nearly \$1 billion increase for Head Start and Early Head Start in the President's budget proposal so that these programs can maintain the unique educational, health, nutrition, and family supports they offer to the most disadvantaged children and families. The funding increase is necessary in order to continue to serve the 14,000 three- and four-year olds in Head Start and the 50,000 infants and toddlers in Early Head Start that were able to participate as a result of ARRA funding and to maintain the approximately 24,000 new jobs that were created.

Substantial research demonstrates that children receiving Head Start services have higher achievement test scores, high school graduation rates, and immunization rates, and decreased child mortality rates, criminal activity, need for special education, and need to repeat grades later on in school.

We urge you to continue to work with Congress to enact and fund the Early Learning Challenge Fund, which would encourage states to build early childhood systems that offer low-income children increased access to high-quality care. The Coalition as well as state policy makers and state early childhood advocates were deeply disappointed that this initiative was not included in the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 as expected, but we are hopeful that there are other options for moving forward. It is essential to make progress on this promising initiative this year to take advantage of the excitement that has been generated for it across the country.

Another important step is to ensure that the Child Nutrition reauthorization includes funding to increase access to CACFP. Given the importance of good nutrition in the early years of life, increasing participation in the highly effective CACFP among child care providers and the children they serve should be a key goal of the reauthorization. This could be accomplished by raising reimbursement rates to enable child care providers to follow the recommendations that the Institute of Medicine will issue on healthier meals, reimbursing providers for serving an additional meal or snack, making it easier for family child care providers to participate in CACFP, reducing paperwork, and expanding support for sponsors who ensure that children in family child care homes can receive the benefits of CACFP.

Finally, we urge you to help more middle-income families with the high costs of child care by asking Congress to expand the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit and to make the credit refundable to enable lower-income families to take advantage of this important credit.

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. These will help parents access the child care they need to get and keep a job and help children access the early learning environments they need to enter school ready to succeed. As a result, the investments will support the Administration's other efforts to strengthen our nation's educational system and to build a productive workforce for today and for the future.

Sincerely,

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 Professional Recognition

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

Early Care and Education Consortium

Easter Seals

Federally Employed Women (FEW)

First Children's Finance

First Focus Campaign for Children

HighScope Educational Research Foundation

IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA)

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Local Initiatives Support Corporation

MomsRising

National Association for Family Child Care

National Association for the Education of Young Children

National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies

National Black Child Development Institute

National Children's Facilities Network

National Council of Jewish Women

National Education Association

National Head Start Association

National Organization for Women

National Women's Law Center

Nonprofit Finance Fund

Pre-K Now, A Campaign of the Pew Center on the States

RESULTS

Service Employees International Union

Teaching Strategies

The First Five Years Fund

Voices for America's Children

Women of Reform Judaism

YMCA of the USA

ZERO TO THREE