

April 27, 2012

Dear Chairmen Inouye, Harkin, Rehberg, and Rogers and Ranking Members DeLauro, Cochran, Dicks, Shelby:

Child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, and other early childhood programs are critical to building a stronger and more productive America. Therefore, we urge you to support an increase of \$825 million for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and a \$325 million increase for Head Start and Early Head Start in FY 2013 in order to sustain effective, high-quality services for at-risk, low-income children and their families. We also urge you to increase funding for early interventions for infants and toddlers with disabilities under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by \$20 million. Additionally, we ask you to allocate a significant portion of Race to the Top funds to state-level Early Learning Challenge grants.

Child care assistance helps low-income parents afford stable care so they can work or go to school, gain financial stability for themselves and their families, and contribute to the nation's economy. In addition, early childhood programs and services such as child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, and Part C, provide disadvantaged children with comprehensive learning experiences during a critical time of cognitive and social development.

Investing in early childhood education is a cost-effective strategy for building economic prosperity – even when trying to reduce the budget deficit. Data consistently show that one of the most effective strategies for economic growth is investing in the developmental growth of at-risk children. Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman wrote to the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform that the greatest economic and societal gains for our nation begin with investments in early education that enable children to develop to their full potential and become productive members of society. Short-term costs are more than offset by the immediate and long-term benefits through reduction in the need for special education and remediation, better health outcomes, reduced need for social services, lower criminal justice costs, and increased self-sufficiency and productivity among families.

America can make social and economic progress with early learning programs, but only if those programs reach the growing number of low-income children. As of February 2011, families in thirty-seven states were worse off under at least one child care policy than they were in February of 2010. Currently, only one in six eligible children receives child care assistance, only about 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers participate in Early Head Start, and only about two-fifths of eligible preschool-age children participate in Head Start.

Supporting child care at the federal level is even more important as funding shrinks at the state level. Four thousand children lost child care assistance in Mississippi at the end of May 2011. Last year, Washington State, for the first time in more than twenty years, began placing families who apply for child care assistance on a waiting list. And the governors of California, Pennsylvania, and Maine have proposed cuts for FY 2013 that would result in many fewer children receiving assistance. The failure to reach a greater number of children and families with early childhood programs is a tremendous lost opportunity to help more children start on the path to success.

An increase of \$825 million in the Child Care and Development Block Grant will allow the program to provide child care assistance to a total of 1.5 million children and allow for new investments in improving the quality of care. Even with the increase, the number of children served would be the lowest since 1998. Increased investments in Head Start and Early Head Start and the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C of IDEA) will maintain the availability of these programs for young children and their families and allow for quality improvements.

Lastly, allocating a significant portion of Race to the Top for state-level Early Learning Challenge grants will help states build comprehensive early childhood systems. The Early Learning Challenge is designed to improve integration, quality, and accountability across early learning funding streams. In order for such work to be effective, it is crucial that early learning RTT funds be specifically designated as state-based funds.

These programs have a wide range of benefits that are crucial for our nation's progress and productivity. If we overlook these benefits, we are compromising our future. Please support these wise investments.

Sincerely,

Afterschool Alliance
AFSCME
Alliance for Early Childhood Finance
Blacks in Law Enforcement of America
Cherokee Nation
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Defense Fund
CLASP
Division for Early Childhood of Council for Exceptional Children
Early Care and Education Consortium
Early Childhood Policy Research
Easter Seals
First Five Years Fund
First Focus Campaign for Children
HighScope Educational Research Foundation
IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Local Initiatives Support Corporation
MomsRising
National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Association for Regulatory Administration
National Black Child Development Institute
National Community Facilities Network
National Council of Jewish Women
National Head Start Association
National Indian Child Care Association
National Migrant Seasonal Head Start Association

National PTA

National Women's Law Center

Parents As Teachers

RESULTS

Service Employees International Union

Teaching Strategies, LLC

Voices for America's Children

ZERO TO THREE