

October 18, 2010

To Members of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform:

As you develop your policy recommendations for improving the nation's fiscal situation, the Child Care and Early Learning Coalition respectfully urges you to ensure that domestic discretionary spending is not reduced to or frozen at levels that are inadequate for meeting our country's critical needs. Cutting or freezing funding for domestic discretionary programs (non-defense and non-homeland security) would jeopardize investments in essential programs such as early care and education. Investments in these programs support the stable, nurturing child care and early learning environments that children, particularly low-income children, need to enter school ready to succeed and that parents need to work, and as a result strengthen our economy now and in the future.

By providing children with high-quality early learning experiences today that promote their successful cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development, we increase the chances that they will go on to graduate high school and participate as productive members of our workforce and society tomorrow. As a result, investments in these programs pay for themselves. Dr. James Heckman, a Nobel-Prize-winning economist at the University of Chicago, states that returns to dollars invested in early interventions for disadvantaged children are as high as 15 to 17 percent per year, as they raise the quality of the workforce, enhance the productivity of schools, and reduce crime, teenage pregnancy, and dependency on welfare.

Recommendations by the Commission to cut or freeze domestic discretionary spending would inevitably require cuts in child care and early education programs as well as other programs supporting young children and their families. This would have a devastating effect on the well-being of our nation and of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Cutting these programs may save a little money in the short term, but will only result in less growth and increased costs to address social problems in the long term – and therefore increased deficits.

Spending on domestic discretionary programs represents less than half of all discretionary spending, and contributes little to accumulated and projected deficits. Too often, however, it has been the focus of deficit reduction efforts. Therefore, we encourage you to focus on other areas of federal spending that contribute more to growing deficits and on responsible tax policies as you work to restore balance to the budget.

The ultimate goal of responsible fiscal policy is to ensure that the nation has the capacity meet national priorities, now and in the future. As you develop your recommendations, we urge you to ensure that investments important to the future of our children, our families, and our nation are not put at risk.

We look forward to working with you as you consider your recommendations. If you have questions about this letter, please contact Helen Blank at hblank@nwlc.org or 202-319-3036.

Sincerely,

Afterschool Alliance
Alliance for Early Childhood Finance
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
Child Welfare League of America
CLASP
Coalition on Human Needs
Council for Exceptional Children
Early Care and Education Consortium
Easter Seals
First Children's Finance
First Five Years Fund
First Focus Campaign for Children
Generations United
HighScope Educational Research Foundation
MomsRising
National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA)
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 Black Child Development Institute
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Children's Facilities Network
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
National Council of Jewish Women
National Head Start Association
National Organization for Women
National PTA
National Women's Law Center
Parents as Teachers National Center
RESULTS
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Teaching Strategies
Voices for America's Children
Women of Reform Judaism
ZERO TO THREE