

May 18, 2011

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

Ensuring a smarter, healthier, and more productive America depends on child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, and other early childhood programs. Therefore, we urge you to support an increase of \$1.2 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and a total of \$8.1 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start in FY 2012 in order to sustain effective, high-quality services for at-risk, low-income children and their families across the nation. 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 \$50 million. In addition, we ask you to support the Department of Education's competitive early childhood grants, which were established in the FY 2011 appropriations legislation, to encourage states to build high-quality early learning systems.

Investments in these programs allow families and our nation to prosper and children to be successful in school and in life. Child care assistance helps low-income parents to afford stable care so they can work, 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. 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. These investments generate greater benefits, which in turn help to reduce the nation's deficit.

In spite of research showing the effectiveness of these programs, insufficient funding has left millions of low-income families and children without access to such basic and beneficial services. Likewise, providers lack the necessary resources to strengthen the quality of their programs. Currently, only one in six eligible children receives child care assistance, only four percent of eligible infants and toddlers participate in Early Head Start, and less than half of eligible preschool-age children participate in Head Start. The number of children able to participate in these programs, along with investments in quality, will shrink further due to state cutbacks. For example, in Mississippi, 4,000 children will lose child care assistance at the end of May. In Florida, which already had 89,000 children on its waiting list for child care assistance as of December, 15,000 children fewer will be able to receive assistance. Washington State, for the first time in more than twenty years, is placing families who apply for child care assistance on a waiting list. 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.

Additional investments in the Child Care and Development Block Grant will allow 1.7 million children to continue to receive high-quality child care while their parents work with the knowledge that their children are in a safe, engaging environment. Similarly, 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, continued funding for the new early childhood grants will help states develop strong early learning systems.

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

Sincerely,

Afterschool Alliance
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Humane Association
Americans for Democratic Action
Cherokee Nation
Children's Defense Fund
Child Welfare League of America
CLASP
Community Action Partnership
Early Care and Education Consortium
Easter Seals
Every Child Matters Education Fund
First Five Years Fund
First Focus Campaign for Children
Generations United
HighScope Educational Research Foundation
Horizons for Homeless Children
Leviticus 25:23 Alternative Fund, Inc.
MomsRising
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Association for Family Child Care
National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA Licensing)
National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies
National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS-SDE)
National Association of Mothers' Centers
National Black Child Development Institute
National Head Start Association
National Indian Child Care Association
National Organization for Women
National Pediatric Support Services
National WIC Association
National Women's Law Center
Pre-K Now, A Campaign of the Pew Center on the States
RESULTS
Service Employees International Union
Teaching Strategies
United Way Worldwide
Voices for America's Children
Women of Reform Judaism
Wider Opportunities for Women
YMCA of the USA
YWCA USA
ZERO TO THREE