

June 24, 2011

The Honorable John Kerry  
United States Senate  
218 Russell Building, Second Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Kerry:

The following organizations strongly support The Children First Act of 2011, and urge the bill's passage. This bill will expand child care assistance for low-income families through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and help bolster the quality of America's child care programs by increasing mandatory child care funding by \$500 million in FY 2012 with provisions for modest increases through FY 2021. The bill will also ensure that the minimum child care standards required for providers receiving CCDBG funding also apply to providers who receive child care funding through TANF.

In these challenging economic times, it is especially important to help families with their child care costs. This assistance enables parents to get and keep a job and their children to be in safe, stable settings that promote their growth and learning. For low- and moderate-income families, child care is often the second or third highest cost in their budgets. Some parents who cannot stretch their budgets to afford the cost of care without assistance are unable to keep their jobs and, sometimes, must turn to welfare. Despite the importance of high-quality child care to school readiness and later success, only one in six children eligible for federal child care assistance receives help.

Unfortunately, only \$100 million of the \$1 billion increase for CCDBG included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was sustained. This loss is compounded by tight state budgets. As a result, many states are unable to meet the significant demand for child care assistance. Georgia will provide child care assistance to an estimated 10,000 fewer children in FY 2012 in part due to the lost of ARRA funds. Arkansas used its ARRA funds to provide child care assistance to over 12,000 additional children and was able to reduced its waiting list. However, the state's waiting list grew from approximately 2,700 children as of February 2010 to approximately 15,000 children as of August 2010. The waiting list for child care assistance in North Carolina increased from 37,900 children in early 2010 to approximately 45,700 in December 2010. In Florida, waiting lists for child care assistance reached 89,000 children as of December 2010. Furthermore, a funding cut of \$68 million in the 2011-2012 budget could cause nearly 15,000 children to lose their current assistance. Nearly 4,000 Mississippi families lost their child care assistance on May 31. Maryland was forced to start a waiting list in late February and more than 1,500 children were on the list in the first month.

We greatly appreciate your leadership on this important issue. The Children First Act of 2011 will provide sorely needed help to young children and their families.

Sincerely,

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees  
American Humane Association  
Children's Defense Fund  
Child Welfare League of America  
CLASP  
Early Care and Education Consortium  
First Five Years Fund  
HighScope Educational Research Foundation  
Horizons for Homeless Children  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
MomsRising  
National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA Licensing)  
National Association for the Education of Young Children  
National Center on Family Homelessness  
National Children's Facilities Network  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Indian Child Care Association  
National Women's Law Center  
RESULTS  
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)  
Teaching Strategies, Inc.  
Voices for America's Children