

March 16, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran:

Child care and early learning are building blocks that support our current and future economy. They do so by helping children enter school ready to succeed and by helping parents work. Despite the growing realization of the importance of the early years, there is still a long way to go to ensure that all children—especially our lowest-income children—have the early learning experiences they need. We urge you to support increases of at least \$1 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), \$1.52 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start, \$500 million for Preschool Development Grants, \$65 million for Grants for Infants and Families (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and \$50 million for Preschool Grants (Part B, Section 619 under IDEA).

### **Child Care and Development Block Grant**

The bipartisan reauthorization of CCDBG enacted in November 2014 was an important recognition of the role that child care plays in supporting young children and enabling parents to work and/or go to school and attain the skills they need to improve their families' economic circumstances. Congress appropriated additional funding last year, but without significant new funding to implement the essential reforms included in the reauthorization states may be forced to cut the number of children receiving child care assistance or reduce fees to already low-paid child care providers. Already, 315,000 children have lost federal child care assistance between 2006 and 2013. Spending has fallen to an 11-year low and the number of children receiving assistance is at a 15-year low. An increase in CCDBG funding would protect access to child care assistance for children and their families while allowing states to achieve the law's goals of protecting children's health and safety in child care, improving the quality of care, and making the program more family-friendly.

### **Head Start and Early Head Start**

Head Start and Early Head Start provide comprehensive early care and education for vulnerable children birth to age five and their families to help prepare children for school. Yet, with current funding, Head Start serves less than half of eligible preschoolers and Early Head Start serves less than 5 percent of eligible infants and toddlers, most for less than the full-school-day, full-school-year schedule that is essential to working families and the most beneficial to young children according to the latest research. Our budget request would enable programs to begin to address the rising costs they face as well as to improve quality—such as by expanding access to full-

school-day and full-school-year services. Additionally, the expansion of Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care partnerships recognizes the extraordinary need for high-quality infant-toddler services. The innovative partnership program enables more children to access high-quality care by expanding Early Head Start and helping child care providers meet higher-quality Early Head Start standards in order to improve the care they offer to young children.

### **Preschool Development Grants**

Preschool Development Grants help states build and strengthen their capacity to offer preschool to four-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families to help prepare them for school success. Currently, fewer than three in 10 four-year-olds participate in a high-quality preschool program. With last year's funding, the competitive Preschool School Grants were made to 18 of the 40 states that applied. An increased investment in this program would allow grants to be provided to more of the states that have demonstrated a clear interest in expanding access to high-quality prekindergarten to the children who need it most.

### **Preschool Grants and Grants for Infants and Families**

The Grants for Infants and Families (IDEA Part C) program helps guarantee that infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families receive the early intervention services they need to identify and address their special needs. Additional funding to this program will allow states to sustain access to these essential services.

Similarly, the Preschool Grants program (IDEA Part B, Section 619) aims to enhance the accessibility of special education for children ages three through five with disabilities. With an increase of \$50 million, this program will be able to expand these services to children in all states.

The evidence is clear that early learning is a worthwhile investment for children, families, and our nation. The costs of these programs are far outpaced by the short- and long-term benefits, which include a reduction in special education and grade retention, higher graduation rates, improved health, and increased financial self-sufficiency in adulthood among those who participated in early learning programs as children. Because of these substantial benefits, economists, business leaders, law enforcement officials, military leaders, researchers and others support early learning investments.

Sorely needed new investments can address the gaps in both the availability and quality of early care and education and enable children, families, and the country to benefit. We urge you to increase funding for these vital early learning programs.

Sincerely,

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)  
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Psychological Association  
Child Care Law Center  
Child Welfare League of America  
Children's Defense Fund  
Children's Leadership Council  
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Common Sense Media  
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC)  
Early Care and Education Consortium  
Early Childhood Policy Research  
Easter Seals  
First Five Years Fund (FFYF)  
First Focus Campaign for Children  
Foster Family-based Treatment Association  
Generations United-Seniors4Kids  
Hadassah  
IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA)  
Learning Disabilities Association of America  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
Make It Work  
MomsRising  
National Association for the Education of Young Children  
National Association for Family Child Care  
National Black Child Development Institute  
National Child Abuse Coalition  
National Children's Facilities Network  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Women's Law Center  
National Black Child Development Institute  
Nemours Children's Health System  
Ounce of Prevention Fund  
Partnership for America's Children  
RESULTS: The Power to End Poverty  
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United: ROC  
SAVE the Children Action Network  
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Teaching Strategies

Teach for America

The National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education

ZERO TO THREE