

April 2, 2014

The Honorable Tom Harkin
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin:

Early learning programs are one of the best investments the country can make to support both our current and future economy. These programs ensure that children get the strong start they need to succeed and that parents can work to support their families. Five recent national polls showed overwhelming public support for a greater investment in early education. We urge you to support increases of at least \$807 million for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), \$1.07 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start, \$100 million for early intervention for infants and toddlers with disabilities under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and \$51 million for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, as well as \$500 million for Preschool Development Grants. We recognize that the Committee is operating under budgetary constraints. However, given the critical nature of the first five years to a child's future success, these programs need substantial investments.

Child care assistance is a key support for low-income families. It enables parents to work and support their children and/or go to school and attain the skills they need to improve their families' economic circumstances. Yet, between 2006 and 2012, 260,000 children lost federal child care assistance. Without a significant increase in child care funding, that number will grow. Spending has fallen to a 10-year low and the number of children receiving assistance is at a 14-year low. At the same time, many women are finding it more difficult to afford reliable child care because their jobs simply do not pay enough. Over one-third of the increase in women's employment in the recovery came in the 10 largest low-wage occupations. Women currently make up more than three-quarters of the workers in these occupations. Projected job growth in the next decade is disproportionately in low-wage, female-dominated occupations. Safe, stable child care not only enables parents to work, but also promotes children's healthy growth and development. But we will only be able to ensure the health and safety of children in child care if additional resources are provided. An increase in CCDBG funding would protect access to child care assistance for 1.4 million children and their families and support efforts to improve the quality and affordability of care offered by tens of thousands of community child care providers.

Head Start and Early Head Start provide comprehensive early care and education for vulnerable children birth to age five to help prepare them for school. Yet Head Start serves only two-fifths of eligible preschoolers and Early Head Start serves less than 4 percent of eligible infants and toddlers. An increase in funding would allow for expansion of high-quality early learning opportunities to an additional 100,000 infants and toddlers through partnerships between Early Head Start and child care providers that meet Early Head Start standards. These partnerships, which received initial funding in last year's budget, can offer full-day, year-round services that address the needs of working parents. The additional funding would also support a cost of living increase for Head Start programs to avoid an erosion of quality as well as additional funds to bolster the quality and lengthen the day of Head Start programs.

Part C under IDEA helps guarantee that infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays and their families receive the early intervention services they need to identify and address their special needs. Additional funding will allow states to sustain access to these essential services.

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program funds activities and services that keep school-age children safe and engaged and that promote their learning during before- and after-school hours and summer days. An increase in funding will protect and expand these learning opportunities.

Preschool Development Grants will encourage states to move forward on efforts to enable more four-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families to participate in high-quality early education programs that prepare them for school success. Less than three in 10 four-year-olds are currently in a high-quality preschool program. An initial investment in this preschool effort can enable more states to expand access to high-quality prekindergarten to the children who need it most.

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 all these benefits, economists, business leaders, law enforcement officials, and military leaders support early learning investments.

By providing crucial investments, we can address the gaps in the availability and quality of early care and education and enable children, families, and the country to benefit from these programs. We urge you to increase funding for these vital early learning programs.

Sincerely,

AFSCME

Afterschool Alliance

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Psychological Association

Campaign for America's Future

Child Welfare League of America

Children's Defense Fund

CLASP

Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Services (DEC)

Early Care and Education Consortium

Easter Seals

Fair Share

First Five Years Fund

First Focus Campaign for Children

IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA)

Local Initiatives Support Corporation

MomsRising

National Association for the Education of Young Children

National Children's Facilities Network

National Women's Law Center

Ounce of Prevention Fund

Parents as Teachers

Save the Children

SEIU

Stand for Children

Teaching Strategies

ZERO to THREE