

November 6, 2014

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski:

Early learning programs have tremendous benefits for our current and future economy. Early care and education opportunities help give children the strong start they need to succeed in school and in life and help parents to get and keep a job so they can support their families. We urge you to include increases for early learning programs in an Omnibus Appropriations Bill for FY 2015.

An increase of \$300 million for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is necessary to implement the provisions included in the CCDBG reauthorization and achieve the legislation's goals of improving the health, safety, and quality of care and increasing families' access to child care assistance, while stemming the steady decline in the number of children and families able to receive child care assistance. The existing CCDBG set-asides for quality expansion activities, improving the quality of infant and toddler care, improving school-age care, child care resource and referral services (including a national toll-free consumer hotline), and child care research should also be continued. In addition, we urge you to support an increase of \$271 million for Head Start and Early Head Start, to cover cost-of-living increases, maintain enrollment, and expand the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships Initiative, as well as an increase of at least \$100 million for Preschool Development Grants and at least \$3.3 million for early intervention for infants and toddlers with disabilities under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

With its strong bipartisan support for the CCDBG reauthorization, Congress demonstrated its commitment to protecting the health and safety of children in care, encouraging efforts to raise the quality of care, and making it easier for families to obtain and retain help paying for care. However, states will only be able to effectively implement the changes in the legislation and take full advantage of the opportunities it offers to strengthen their child care programs if they receive additional resources. Additional funding is also necessary to prevent children and their families from losing child care assistance as states devote more resources to complying with the legislation's provisions. We have already seen a significant drop in the number of children and families served. In 2013, there were 47,500 fewer children receiving child care assistance than in 2012 and 358,700 fewer children than the peak in 2001. At the same time, many women are in low-wage jobs where they do not earn enough to pay for care on their own; over one-third of the gains in women's employment in the recovery came in the 10 largest low-wage occupations.

Parents in low-wage jobs need help affording child care so they can stay employed while ensuring their children are in safe, nurturing environments.

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 less than half of eligible preschoolers and Early Head Start serves only 4 percent of eligible infants and toddlers. An increase in funding would support efforts to expand high-quality early learning opportunities for 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, aim to help working parents with children under age three, in particular, by offering full-day, full-year early care and education programs. The additional funding would also cover a cost-of-living increase for Head Start programs so that they do not have to reduce the quality or level of services offered or the number of children able to participate.

Part C under IDEA supports early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays and their families, to identify children's special needs and address those needs. Additional funding will enable states to maintain these early intervention services that are so valuable to very young children and their families.

Preschool Development Grants give states an opportunity to strengthen and expand existing preschool programs or start new programs so that more four-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families can participate in high-quality early education programs. In the 2012-13 school year, state prekindergarten programs served only 28 percent of four-year-olds, and only five states had prekindergarten programs that met 10 key quality benchmarks, according to the National Institute of Early Education Research. States have shown a clear interest in expanding and strengthening their preschool programs, with 35 states applying in the initial Preschool Development Grant competition.

Early learning investments have the strong support of economists, business leaders, law enforcement officials, and military leaders, as well as the general public. This broad support reflects a recognition that early learning investments have benefits that far exceed any initial costs. Children who participate in high-quality early care and education are less likely to be retained a grade and more likely to graduate from high school and to be healthy and financially self-sufficient in adulthood. These outcomes not only benefit children and their families, but the entire nation.

With additional investments in important early learning programs, we can improve the early learning experiences children now receive, reach more of the children and families who stand to gain from participating, and give children a strong start on the path to success.

Sincerely,

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers
Afterschool Alliance
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
American Psychological Association
Center for Community Change
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Child Care Law Center
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Advocacy Institute
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Leadership Council
Coalition on Human Needs
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC)
Easter Seals
Every Child Matters
Fair Share
Family Values @ Work
First Five Years Fund
First Focus
Forum for Young Investment
Generations United, Seniors for Kids
IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA)
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
MomsRising
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
National Association of Counsel for Children
The National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS-SDE)
National Association of Family Child Care
National Child Abuse Coalition
National Child Development Institute
National Council of Jewish Women
National Institute for Children's Health Quality
National Organization for Women
National Women's Law Center
Nemours Children's Health System
Ounce of Prevention Fund
Parents as Teachers
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United
RESULTS
Save the Children Action Network
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
SparkAction

Teaching Strategies
United Way Worldwide
YWCA
ZERO TO THREE