

March 3, 2016

United States Senate/United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C., 20510/20515

Dear Senator/Representative

We are writing regarding funding for early childhood education and development programs in the fiscal year 2017 (FY 2017) appropriations. Child care and early learning are intricately connected to the strength of our current and future economy. They give children the experiences that they need to enter school ready to succeed and provide parents with the opportunity to work and support their families. Although there is widespread agreement about the importance of the early years to children's successful development, too many children, particularly those from low-income families, still do not have the chance to participate in the high-quality early learning experiences they need. We urge you to build upon the welcome increases you provided in FY 2016, by supporting increases in FY 2017 of at least \$1.2 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), \$434 million for Head Start and Early Head Start, \$35 million for Preschool Grants, (Part B, Section 619 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), \$45 million for Grants for Infants and Families (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and \$100 million for Preschool Development Grants.

Child Care and Development Block Grant

There is great promise in the reforms included in the bipartisan reauthorization of CCDBG. Unfortunately, there is still insufficient funding to implement these reforms, which are designed to achieve the important goals of ensuring the health and safety of child care, improve the quality of care, and make it easier for families to obtain and retain child care assistance. Without a significant increase in CCDBG funding, many states may be forced to cut the number of children receiving child care assistance or reduce payment rates for already low-paid child care providers. Already, nearly 364,000 children lost federal child care assistance between 2006 and 2014, leaving the number of children receiving assistance at a 16-year low. Only one state reimburses child care providers who serve children receiving child care assistance at the federally recommended level. Without substantial new funding for CCDBG, fewer families will be able to receive the help they need affording child care, providers will be further deprived of the resources they need to support high-quality care, and the goals of the CCDBG reauthorization will go unfulfilled.

Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start play an important role in providing vulnerable children under age five with the comprehensive care and education that they need to prepare for school. At the current level of funding, Head Start is able to serve only slightly over two out of five eligible preschoolers and Early Head Start serves just 4 percent of eligible infants and toddlers. Proposals

for more Head Start programs to provide full-school-day, full-school-year services would help to ensure that our lowest-income children receive a strong early learning experience. However, this change will require additional investments so that the additional hours and days of programming do not result in cuts in the number of children participating in Head Start or in the number of staff employed by programs. Increased funding would also enable all programs, including the recent Early Head Start and Early Head Start/Child Care Partnership grantees which reach our youngest children at a period of rapid brain development, to retain staff and keep up with increases in program costs.

Preschool Development Grants

Currently, fewer than three in 10 four-year-olds participate in a high-quality preschool program. Preschool Development Grants offer states an opportunity to focus on strengthening their early learning infrastructure and increase the number of low- and moderate-income children participating in preschool programs. Funding will allow the 18 states currently participating to complete their grant requirements, and additional funds will offer other states an opportunity to participate in the newly authorized program under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Preschool Grants and Grants for Infants and Families

The Grants for Infants and Families (IDEA Part C) program is geared toward helping infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Additional funding for this program will allow states to sustain access to the early intervention services that are so essential to addressing these young children's special needs and supporting their families.

The Preschool Grants Program (IDEA Part B, Section 619) enhances the accessibility of special education for children ages three through five with disabilities. An increase of \$35 million would assist states in ensuring services to all eligible children in the state.

We appreciate the recognition of the importance of early learning in past appropriations bills and the understanding of the difference strong early learning opportunities can have for children and their families. Across the country, public officials, business leaders, law enforcement officials and others agree that investing in the early years is one of the wisest steps we can take as a country. We urge you to continue to increase funding and help more children and their families start off on the path to success.

Sincerely,

AFSCME

American Academy of Pediatrics

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Child Welfare League of America

Children's Defense Fund

Children's Leadership Council
Common Sense Kids Action
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC)
Early Care and Education Consortium
Easter Seals
First Five Years Fund
Generations United
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA)
MomsRising
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
National Association for Family Child Care
National Head Start Association
National Women's Law Center
Parents as Teachers
RESULTS
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Teaching Strategies, LLC
ZERO TO THREE