

February 25, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Blunt and Ranking Member Murray,

We deeply appreciate the increased investments in early childhood in the FY 2019 omnibus appropriations bill. As you weigh your budget choices for FY 2020, we urge you to lift the caps on non-defense domestic discretionary funding and to expand the federal commitment to early care and education. For the FY 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill, we request that you increase funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) by \$5 billion over the FY 2019 level, increase funding for Head Start and Early Start by \$1.495 billion, and provide \$250 million for Preschool Development Grants. We ask you to increase funding for early intervention services provided through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C (Grants for Infants and Families) from \$470 million to \$531 million and for Part B, Section 619 (Preschool Grants) under IDEA from \$391 million to \$441.8 million. Funding for these two programs has remained at almost level funding for many years. As we move to increase opportunities for all young children to access high-quality early care and learning programs, these IDEA supports and services are critical to ensure young children with disabilities are able to succeed with their peers that are typically developing.

Together, these programs help parents work, boost the well-being of children, and make our economy stronger.

The increase in child care funding in FY 2019 has had tremendous benefits for children and families across the country. States have been able to make significant additional progress in implementing the reforms included in the 2014 CCDBG reauthorization law designed to ensure 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. For example, states have used the new CCDBG funds for purposes such as helping providers cover the costs of criminal background checks, ensuring families can receive child care assistance for a continuous 12 months to allow them to have more stable child care, supporting professional development opportunities for child care teachers, and hiring additional inspectors to monitor child care programs.

Many states are using the funds to help more families receive help in paying for child care. For example, Mississippi used the new CCDBG funds to provide child care assistance to 7,000 more children, which helped the state clear its waiting list for assistance. Arkansas used the funds to support 3,800 new child care assistance slots, which allowed the state to clear its waiting list. Louisiana is using its additional funds to serve approximately 4,500 children on the waiting list.

Over half of the states are using or planning to use their new CCDBG funds to increase payment rates for child care providers serving families who receive child care assistance. These states include Alabama, Connecticut, Maine, Mississippi, and Rhode Island. Some states have focused on raising payment rates for care for infants and toddlers to address the serious shortage of high-quality infant/toddler care. Payment rates help determine whether child care providers have sufficient resources to sustain their businesses, offer salaries that are high enough to attract and retain qualified staff and that allow child care workers to earn enough to support themselves and their families, have low child-staff ratios, maintain facilities, and buy materials and supplies for activities that encourage children's learning and development. Inadequate payment rates can discourage high-quality providers from enrolling families who receive child care assistance.

Despite this progress, further investments are needed to fully compensate for years of stagnant funding. Total funding for child care (including CCDBG funds and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds used for child care) in FY 2018 remained nearly \$1 billion short of the total funding level in FY 2001 after adjusting for inflation. As a result, many families are still unable to access help paying for care due to state income limits that remain low or waiting lists that remain long, and many child care providers—particularly those in low-income neighborhoods—still struggle to stay in business due to payment rates that remain low.

Additional investments are also essential for Head Start and Early Head Start, which represent our national commitment to ensuring America's most vulnerable children and families have an opportunity to succeed in school and in life regardless of circumstances at birth. Recent research has affirmed the program's success at disrupting generational poverty, among other significant long- and short-term outcomes. Building on increases in FY 2019, we encourage you to direct funding increases for Head Start and Early Head Start into three areas. First, we ask that you provide \$250 million to support the Head Start and Early Head Start workforce through a cost of living adjustment in line with inflation. Second, we recommend an increase of \$745 million for quality improvement funding specifically focused on addressing the impacts of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) on children in Head Start and Early Head Start. Quality improvement funding allows for each grantee to tailor supports for the unique needs of children and families in their community. Finally, we ask that you continue building on recent increases in Early Head Start with \$500 million in additional funding to expand critical high-quality services for infants and toddlers.

Expanded investments in Preschool Development Grants, Grants for Infants and Families, and Preschool Grants will enable more children to take advantage of early learning opportunities that encourage their learning and growth and will support efforts to further strengthen the quality of these programs. Research has demonstrated that high-quality early education has long-term benefits for children, especially low-income children, that far exceed the costs. Children who participate in high-quality early education programs have a reduced need for special education, improved health outcomes, higher rates of high school and college graduation, decreased dependence on welfare programs, and increased workforce productivity.

Despite the promise of significant returns, federal early childhood programs reach only a fraction of eligible children and families. Due to insufficient funding, five out of six children who are

eligible for federal child care assistance do not receive it. Only about half of eligible preschool-age children can participate in Head Start, and less than 8 percent of eligible infants and toddlers receive Early Head Start services. Families who have been struggling the most must no longer be overlooked and must get the affordable, stable, high-quality child care that parents need to get and keep a job and their children need to encourage their learning and growth.

Investments in child care, Head Start, and other key early learning programs are integral to the strength of our nation's economy. With expanded funding for these essential programs in the FY 2020 appropriations measure, we can give more children and families opportunities to thrive. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees
American Federation of Teachers
American Psychological Association
BUILD Initiative
Center for Community Change Action
Center for Law and Social Policy
Child Care Aware of America
Children's Defense Fund
Child Welfare League of America
Coalition on Human Needs
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
Early Care and Education Consortium
Every Child Matters
First Five Years Fund
First Focus Campaign for Children
IDEA Infant and Toddler Coordinators Association
Moms Rising
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Council of Jewish Women
National Indian Child Care Association
National Organization for Women
National Women's Law Center
New America's Early & Elementary Education Policy Program
Ounce of Prevention Fund
Partnership for America's Children
RESULTS
Save the Children Action Network
Service Employees International Union
SparkAction
Teaching Strategies

The Forum for Youth Investment
United Parent Leaders Action Network (UPLAN)
United Way Worldwide
Voices for Progress
ZERO TO THREE