

March 24, 2017

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
135 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

We are writing to call your attention to essential early childhood programs as you begin the Fiscal Year 2018 Appropriations process. Child care and early childhood education are crucial to our nation's children, women, and families and to our economic growth and prosperity. High-quality early care and education allows parents to work while knowing their children are safe and nurtured and gives children the benefit of learning experiences at a critical time in their development. Over the past year, there has been heightened focus on the importance of child care and early education—and on the challenges families face in accessing it. We urge you to address these challenges by increasing overall funding in Labor-HHS-Education to allow for increased investments in early childhood programs.

Prior to the expiration of the current continuing resolution for FY 2017, we hope that you will reach agreement on a final appropriations measure that provides the modest funding increases for early care and education that were included in previous House and Senate bills. We ask that you then support substantial new funding in FY 2018 to address children and families' urgent unmet needs for child care and early education opportunities through the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start, Early Head Start and other early childhood programs.

Research shows that investing in early care and education strengthens America's families and our nation's economy. Children who participate in high-quality early learning programs are more likely to succeed in school and contribute to the workforce as adults. These programs are particularly important for children from low-income families, who benefit from high-quality early learning opportunities that give them a strong start in school and in life. In addition, parents who have reliable child care for their children have lower rates of absenteeism, higher rates of job retention, and higher rates of job satisfaction. By supporting the funding levels for key early childhood program recommended below, you will enable more children and families—and our country—to reap these benefits.

Child Care and Development Block Grant

Every working parent needs stable, high-quality child care to focus and be productive in their job. Congress recognized this in 2014 when it reauthorized the Child Care and Development Block Grant

(CCDBG) with broad bipartisan support. CCDBG provides critical child care assistance to low-income parents who are working or in education or training and helps build the infrastructure that supports high-quality care for all families. The recent reauthorization of CCDBG includes important reforms directed at improving the health and safety of children in child care and increasing the continuity of care for children receiving child care assistance.

To ensure that these reforms can be implemented without reducing families' access to child care assistance, a significant increase in funding for CCDBG is necessary in FY 2018. The number of children receiving child care assistance has already declined by 373,000 children between FY 2006 and FY 2015 due to stagnant funding. Only one in six children eligible for federal child care assistance receives it. Increasing federal funding by \$1.4 billion will provide states with the resources necessary to implement the essential reforms contained in the reauthorization while preventing more children from losing child care assistance. In reauthorizing CCDBG in 2014, Congress showed a commitment to improving children's access to healthy and safe child care. We hope that the FY 2018 appropriations measure will reflect this commitment.

Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start offer early learning, health, nutrition and family support services to low-income families and children birth to age five. The programs take a comprehensive two-generation approach to meeting the needs of the whole child and the whole family. Services are targeted and diverse in order to respond to each family's individualized needs. This localized method of service delivery supports stability and long-term success for the families who are most at risk.

Head Start and Early Head Start have served 32 million children and families in communities across the country since 1965. Yet many low-income families are not able to benefit from these programs. Less than half of eligible three- and four-year-olds are able to participate in Head Start, and only about 6 percent of eligible infants and toddlers are able to participate in Early Head Start.

Last year, new Head Start Performance Standards were finalized, streamlining and reorganizing program requirements to make it easier to operate a high-quality Head Start program and better meet the needs of working families. To implement these revised performance standards and support ongoing quality improvements in programs such as extended-duration services, without reducing vulnerable families' access to this flagship program, we ask that you provide Head Start with robust funding in the FY 2018 appropriations bill. Additionally, given the small number of children that Early Head Start can serve, together with the dearth of high-quality services for infants and toddlers in general, we continue to support the Committee's effort to expand Early Head Start, including through child care partnerships.

Preschool Development Grants

The recently passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) recognizes the importance of a continuum of learning throughout the law and makes clear that a child's path toward college and career readiness begins with a high-quality early education. One way in which ESSA supports early childhood education role in preparing children to succeed in school is by authorizing the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) program within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). PDG grantees are now working in over 200 communities in 18 states to expand access to high-quality preschool opportunities. We request that funding for FY 2018 allow for sufficient resources to enable a new competition for PDGs so that additional states could lay the foundation for increased access to high-quality early education programs.

Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities

Early intervention services assist infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities. These services support children with disabilities and their families beginning in the early developmental years,

potentially reducing the need for costlier supports in later years. Through the Grants for Infants and Families program (Part C of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act), states implement systems of coordinated, comprehensive, multidisciplinary, interagency programs and make early intervention services available to children with disabilities, ages birth through two, and their families.

We request that you increase funding for the Grants for Infants and Families Program by 15 percent, to a total of \$527.33 million in FY 2018. This increase could support a number of initiatives, including incentive grants to states to support continuous services for children with disabilities and their families until the children are eligible to enter elementary school. When implemented well, these services provide for a seamless transition from the very first stages of a child's development into early education and then elementary school.

Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities

Special Education Preschool Grants (Part B of IDEA), supports children with disabilities in accessing preschool opportunities and federal and state early learning programs such as Head Start and CCDBG. To receive funding through the Preschool Grants program, states must assure the U.S. Department of Education they will offer free, appropriate public education to all children with disabilities, ages three through five. Every state currently meets this standard, and in FY 2015, over 753,000 children with disabilities had access to services nationwide.

Part B is the only federal program dedicated to preschool-aged children with disabilities and provides an essential service to children with disabilities across the country. We hope you will recognize the importance of this program and increase funding for Part B by 15 percent, to a total of \$423.47 million. This will allow for an increase in the federal share per child and assist states in ensuring that all children with disabilities ages three through five have access to preschool.

Nondefense Discretionary Programs

Nondefense discretionary (NDD) programs provide American children and their families with the resources they need to live healthy, stable, and secure lives. These programs—which include child care and early learning programs as well as nutrition, education, health, and other fundamental programs—bolster the economy, drive the United States' global competitiveness, and support citizens' well-being. To ensure continued support for children and their families, we urge you to increase nondefense discretionary programs for FY 2018 by \$16 to \$20 billion over the FY 2017 level (\$518.5 billion), to maintain the current level of services. We certainly oppose any reduction in funding below the FY 2017 level, as any further cuts would be detrimental to the success of American children and families.

We want to once again thank you for your bipartisan work to increase federal resources for our youngest learners and their families in past appropriations bills. By continuing to expand investments in affordable child care and early learning opportunities that meet all families' needs, you would enable parents to take advantage of job opportunities, put children on a path to success, support the teachers who care for and educate our young children, and ensure that employers have a strong workforce now and in the future.

Sincerely,

9to5, National Association of Working Women
American Federation of State, County and
Municipal Employees
American Academy of Pediatrics

American Federation of Teachers
Center for Law and Social Policy
Child Care Aware
Child Care Law Center

Child Welfare League of America
Children's Advocacy Institute
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Leadership Council
Coalition for Human Needs
Common Sense Kids Action
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for
Exceptional Children
Early Care and Education Consortium
Easterseals
Every Child Matters
The First Five Years Fund
First Focus
The Forum for Youth Investment
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of
America, Inc.
IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association
Local Initiatives Support Corporation
Los Angeles Universal Preschool
MomsRising
National Association for the Education of Young

Children
National Association for Family Child Care
National Association of Counsel for Children
National Association of State Directors of Special
Education
National Head Start Association
National Indian Child Care Association
National Parent Teacher Association
National Women's Law Center
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Organization United for Respect at Walmart
Parent-Child Home Program
Parents as Teachers
Partnership for America's Children
RESULTS: The Power to End Poverty
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network
Service Employees International Union
Teaching Strategies
Young Women's Christian Association
ZERO TO THREE