



First Five Years Fund

March 26, 2012

The First Five Years Fund shared the recommendations below with the following House and Senate leaders:

Chairman Dennis Rehberg (R-MT)
Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)
*House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies*

Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA)
Ranking Member Richard Shelby (R-AL)
*Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies*

Thank you for supporting high-quality early learning opportunities for young children in the first five years of life. We appreciate your steadfast commitment to expanding early childhood education opportunities in the face of difficult budget decisions.

Research demonstrates that investments in high-quality early childhood education generate lasting returns in health, education, and economic productivity. The First Five Years Fund (FFYF) therefore requests that the Fiscal Year 2013 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bills include the following provisions:

- **An increase of \$325 million for Head Start and Early Head Start.** This would enable cost-of-living adjustments for the program to maintain quality as energy and other costs rise; a modest increase in the number of Early Head Start slots; and transition funding for programs in which the grantee will be changing pursuant to recompetition. FFYF strongly supports expanding the number of children who can enroll in Early Head Start, which currently serves less than 4 percent of the infants and toddlers eligible to benefit from the program's offerings to develop educational, health, and executive function skills. We also want to ensure that quality for the 900,000 children currently enrolled in the program does not erode or decline.
- FFYF encourages you to **specify that a significant portion of Race to the Top funds be dedicated to state-level Early Learning Challenge grants**, an essential tool to enable states to undertake comprehensive efforts to improve integration, quality, and accountability across early learning funding streams. In addition to setting aside a significant portion of the funding for Early Learning Challenge, and in light of difficult discussions about the use of Race to the Top funds for early learning in the FY 2012 budget, we encourage you to clearly designate that Early Learning Challenge funds should support quality systems building at the state level prior to any grants being awarded at the local level. As the applications submitted in late 2011 illustrate, there is still important and meaningful work to be done by states to develop frameworks that support quality in order to maximize the effectiveness of local initiatives, including those carried out by school districts.

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- **An \$825 million increase for the Child Care and Development Block Grant**, which would still result in 200,000 fewer children being served compared to 2010. Without these needed funds, an additional 100,000 children are expected to lose access to subsidized child care in the coming year, at precisely the time when the economy is beginning to recover and more working class families are finding jobs. As importantly, **this request includes \$325 million to help improve the quality of child care programs across the country**, so they can better meet the needs of young children and improve the educational, health and economic returns on this investment in safe places for children to learn and grow while their parents are at work or school.

Our nation's rebounding economy and mounting debt require wise stewardship of taxpayer dollars. The return to society generated by high-quality early childhood education justifies a significant investment by your subcommittee. As Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman pointed out during a visit to Capitol Hill, "If you could borrow money at 4 percent and be guaranteed a 10 percent return, wouldn't you do it?" Early childhood education reduces costs in special education, grade retention, and criminal justice—making these investments among the wisest and most cost-effective decisions our nation can make to build economic growth and prosperity.

Please let me know if the First Five Years Fund can provide you with any additional information. Thank you again for your commitment to young children and their early learning opportunities.

Sincerely,



K. Shiek Pal, Esq.
Director of Policy & Government Relations
The First Five Years Fund