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Testimony Before the House Subcommittee on

Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

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Mr. Chairman. Members of the Committee:

The book of Isaiah, Chapter 58 tells me that all of my religious practices are worthless if I am not about the task of breaking the yoke of oppression. And in my mind, there is no greater yoke of oppression than that which is laid upon a child born into intergenerational poverty.

The problem of intergenerational poverty is highly complex and over the past decades, if nothing else, we have proven that there is no silver bullet solution to the problem. But we do know that education is foundational to a child's ability to break the chains of poverty.

I have two of my grandsons here with me today from Edmond, Oklahoma. They were born into affluence and have had every benefit afforded to them to give them a path to a successful life. Those benefits began the day they were born. From their first days of life, they have had twice as many words spoken to them as compared to a child raised in poverty and the resulting extra brain stimulation they have received from reading, singing and talking, particularly in the first

three years of life, has created a brain development gap between them and a child in poverty which is extremely difficult to bridge.

For the child in poverty, that gap will lead to lower achievement, lower earnings, higher incarceration rates and a greater likelihood of teen pregnancy – all at great cost to our society. The best course to reducing this societal cost is to address the brain development gap before it is ever created, by investing in high quality very early childhood education together with parental training – particularly in teaching parents the value of talking, reading and singing to their infants and toddlers.

Such is the mission to which the George Kaiser Family Foundation, Tulsa Educare and (not to speak for Mr. Dow) Community Action Project are dedicated.

However, we also believe strongly in the value of public-private partnerships in addressing the issue. In Tulsa, we have combined Federal Child Care, Head Start and Early Head Start grants, State of Oklahoma grants and private philanthropy to develop a robust and growing system of high quality early childhood centers. The Oklahoma grants were structured as matching grants, with the State matching philanthropy dollars contributed. We believe this committee should consider a similar structure for Federal grants.

The value of public-private partnerships is somewhat obvious as government dollars are stretched further through private philanthropy. But further we believe these partnerships add an element of local accountability as donors expect a return on their philanthropic investment with reporting of outcomes to prove it.

As a businessman, I also understand there are times when we must do more with less. While I strongly believe that there are few if any areas of the federal government more worthy of expanded funding, especially in view of the long term savings to society generated by early childhood education investment, I also believe that there are decisions and reforms that can be made within Head Start and Early Head Start which can increase impact without additional outlays of funding,

First, I believe that all of us should encourage the Department of Health and Human Services to strengthen its re-compete processes. It is always hard to reallocate funding, but being good stewards of these resources requires poor agencies to lose funds (or slots) and strong agencies to gain added funds (or slots), regardless of the politics. In my view, these re-allocations should take place even across state borders. Reward excellence and remove poor performers. We owe that to children and to the taxpayers.

Second, given the fact that about 50 percent of eligible children are served in Head Start but only about 5 percent of eligible children are served in Early Head Start and considering that brain research tells us the most crucial time for child brain development is birth to three years

of age, I believe that we must encourage incremental available dollars, whether through appropriations or the re-competition process, to be awarded to the youngest children, that is, to Early Head Start. To give children born into poverty a fighting chance to succeed, we simply must address the brain development gap before the age of four.

In closing, I return to Isaiah 58. We are told that if we do away with the yoke of oppression and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, our light will rise in the darkness and our night will become like the noonday. May we be lights shining in the darkness.

Addendum to Oral Testimony – Oklahoma Public Private Partnership

In 2006, the State of Oklahoma instituted what is now called the Oklahoma Early Childhood Project. Currently, the state invests roughly \$10 million per year that must be matched with \$15 million of private money to support high quality Birth-Three education for poor families (185% or less of federal poverty level) around the State. This is the largest public-private partnership in the country for Birth-Three early childhood education, and this program has been recognized as being an innovative model for expanding and enhancing high-quality services for infants and toddlers and their families.

We have seen impressive results on behalf of the 2500 children and families who have benefited from this program. The results of an independent evaluation conducted by the University of Oklahoma Early Childhood Education Institute found the program has been successful in expanding access to and enhancing the quality of infant/toddler services statewide – more young children are receiving high-quality infant/toddler care and education as a result of the program

A study of child outcomes in 2008-2010 found that:

- Although the children enrolled in OECP started the program year off with significantly lower language and cognitive scores, they ended the year on par with their non-disadvantaged classroom peers. This is good news because family income was more than 2 times greater for the non-disadvantaged peers. This suggests the high-quality OECP classrooms “boosted” the achievement of the low-income children who at the beginning of the year were lagging behind their non-disadvantaged peers.
- Social-emotional development was significantly better for children in the OECP classrooms. This is good news because these “soft skills” have been found to be predictors of important characteristics such as persistence and positive behavior that are associated with long-term job and life success.
- OECP classrooms had better language and literacy environments and better teacher-child interactions – no doubt the driver of the good language, cognitive, and social-emotional child outcomes.

By serving children living in families with incomes up to 185% of the federal poverty level, OECP is able to serve an expanded group of children who often do not receive high-quality care. Also, the inclusion of for-profit, Tribal and not-for-profit programs in both urban and rural areas of the state increased the diversity of children and families served and benefiting more Oklahoma families.

OECP includes flexibility in funding and draws on several funding streams demonstrating a successful public-private partnership model. As noted above, this model has received attention and is considered an innovative model for our country.