



January 22, 2020

Deputy Director Russell Vought
The Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20503

Re: Recommendations for the President's FY 2021 Budget

Dear Deputy Director Vought,

As we anticipate the publication of the President's FY 2021 Budget, the First Five Years Fund (FFYF) would like to strongly encourage the administration to prioritize funding for the key federal early learning and care programs. For the last decade, bipartisan efforts have resulted in major achievements for America's youngest learners through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start, Preschool Development Grant - Birth through Five (PDG B-5), and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B, Section 619 and Part C. These federal early childhood education programs allow states and communities to provide low-income children with high-quality learning and development opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach. Even though these programs serve millions of children each year, only a fraction of those eligible actually benefit due to significant underfunding. Additionally, access to affordable high-quality child care still remains a barrier for many parents who wish to enter and remain in the workforce. We must have more robust funding of all early learning and care programs, in order to increase the supply of high-quality opportunities, to meet the growing demand, and enable communities to meet the needs of working families.

The White House Principles for Child Care Reform (the Principles) articulate a strategy for improving access to affordable, high-quality care "by taking steps to increase investment, build the supply of child care, cultivate the child care workforce, and improve options for families across a range of high quality settings." The Principles call for reauthorization and reform of the CCDBG Act, including increased flexibility for states who have struggled to meet requirements enacted in the bipartisan 2014 reauthorization. These requirements were intended to improve the overall quality of care and to make it easier for parents to find and maintain high-quality care.

Flexibility is important, particularly when states can demonstrate an alternative structure would be equally effective in meeting the needs of those they serve; however, meeting these significant new quality and safety standards requires investment in provider and state-level systems capacity to deliver, support, and oversee quality programs. As states continue to implement the 2014 quality improvements, as well as any reforms that might stem from the Principles, sustained and supplementary funding is essential to ensuring these reforms have the desired effect.

The Principles also emphasize the need to build the supply of child care providers. In our [response to the recent Administration for Children and Families' request for information](#), FFYF shared several suggestions for how this might be done, more than a few of which were echoed in the Principles, including federal funding for early childhood education apprenticeships; low- or no-interest loans to providers, particularly in rural or underserved areas, to build the child care supply and to improve business practices; and shared-services alliances to bolster existing state, local, and private efforts and help recruit and retain providers across the range of child care settings.

Finally, the Principles call for consideration of a new state and federal early learning and care finance structure. A 2017 Government Accountability Office report¹ reviewed the field of early learning and care programs and addressed the efficacy and intentional targeting of the federal mixed-delivery system. The report highlights the importance of the varied approaches for meeting families' diverse needs and confirmed that agency coordination has mitigated the possible negative effects of fragmentation and overlap. We would strongly urge that any reform efforts be built upon existing programs, meeting states and localities where they are, and that the federal budget continue to support these essential programs.

As an organization dedicated to ensuring all children from birth through age five have equal access to affordable, comprehensive, high-quality care and education, we are grateful to see this goal at the core of the White House Principles for Child Care Reform. Moving forward, we hope to see this prioritized in the federal budget as well. If you have any questions or if we can provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'SR', is positioned below the text 'Sincerely,'.

Sarah Rittling
Executive Director
First Five Years Fund

cc: Jennifer L. Hanson
Chief, Income Maintenance Branch
The Office of Management and Budget

¹ Government Accountability Office Report to the Chairwoman, Committee on Education and the Workforce, House of Representatives, *Early Learning and Child Care: Agencies Have Helped Address Fragmentation and Overlap Through Improved Coordination*, July 2017, (<https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/685775.pdf>)