

April 22, 2022

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

High-quality child care and early learning programs play a crucial role in supporting children's healthy development, learning, and school readiness, while also supporting parents' ability to work, train, or pursue an education. Given the value of these opportunities, we greatly appreciate the bipartisan support for increases in funding for federal early learning programs in recent years and the ways in which this funding has helped to extend the reach of state and federal programs to serve more families and improve the overall quality of care. Still, too many families struggle to find and afford high-quality care that meets their needs, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges.

Prior to the pandemic, the two largest programs, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Head Start served just a fraction of eligible families—less than 1 in 7 eligible families received a subsidy under CCDBG, and just over 1 in 3 and 1 in 10 eligible children had access to Head Start and Early Head Start's comprehensive services, respectively. Likewise, federal investments in both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C infant and toddler program and Part B, Section 619 preschool program have failed to match increases in the number of children served, as well as the cost of inflation. Consequently, both programs have experienced significant erosion of funding over the last two decades. According to the U.S. Department of Education, this has caused financial constraints at the State level that have impacted access to services.

Additionally, the Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5) program continues to offer states a unique opportunity to inventory the availability and quality of programs, while thinking strategically about how to optimize federal and state funding streams. Current and proposed activities of the renewal grantees demonstrate that states are successfully using these funds to reach more children and families, whether by shifting resources where they're most needed or realizing efficiencies within their existing systems. This work is all the more valuable as states continue to recover from the pandemic, and yet, because of funding constraints, only 28 of the 46 planning grant recipients have received renewal grants.

We applaud the overwhelming recognition by lawmakers of the vital role quality child care and early learning play in both a child's early development and our nation's economic recovery, as well as the need to address underlying issues in our child care and early learning structure to develop a system that works better for families and providers alike. The long-awaited relief provided in the American Rescue Plan has been essential to the child care sector, which is the linchpin for our country's economic recovery. To be clear, though, this supplemental relief funding is temporary, as it was intended to be, and it does not diminish the need for increased appropriations for federal child care and early learning programs.

In fact, it is critical that we continue to grow the base funding for core federal programs today, to ensure we mitigate the impact of the expiration of relief funding in the near future. Annual appropriations allow these programs to continue to provide sustained services to low-income children and families, improve compensation in order to recruit and retain a talented workforce, and meet their statutory and regulatory requirements. For example, a portion of CCDBG funds must be used for quality improvement, however, faced with limited funds, states already must balance implementing new health and safety requirements enacted in 2014, increasing payment rates, serving more children, or expanding eligibility. Additionally, Congress should prioritize providing dedicated federal funding to address the rapidly deteriorating state of early learning facilities nation-wide. The physical spaces where young children learn, play, and grow contribute to their cognitive development and social, emotional, and physical well-being, as well as teacher effectiveness and well-being.

The President's FY2023 Budget includes discretionary funding increases for early learning and care programs. As a community we request Congress provide:

- An additional \$6.17 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) (a total of \$12.3 billion), which will expand the base CCDBG budget to avoid damaging cliffs and support states in making targeted investments to their child care systems aligned with longer-term recovery needs.
- An additional \$4.4 billion for Head Start (a total of \$15.4 billion). Specifically, \$1 billion for expansion of Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, \$596 million to sustain the workforce through a cost-of-living adjustment, \$2.5 billion for

workforce compensation realignment, \$262 million to provide flexibility to address local quality improvement priorities, including facilities, and \$10 million to help develop the most effective and appropriate staff for American Indian/Alaska Native programs.

- An additional \$435.7 million for early intervention services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C (bringing total funding to \$932 million) and \$105 million for preschool special education services under Part B, Section 619 (bringing total funding to \$502.5 million).
- An additional \$210 million for the Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5) program (a total of \$500 million) to support states' and territories' efforts to increase the quality and efficiency of existing early learning programs and systems, while thinking strategically about how to optimize federal and state funding streams. Through PDG B-5, Congress has the unique opportunity to foster state-led early learning initiatives, which is particularly necessary as states continue to recover from the pandemic.

Increased annual appropriations will be critical to ensure we build on recent relief investments and continue on the road to economic recovery. The dire effects of the pandemic will be felt for years to come, and providers who suffered tremendous financial losses, acquired personal debt to stay afloat, or were forced to close will need consistent, ongoing support; without it, we risk backsliding, further perpetuating instability in our early learning system. Additionally, increased appropriations would provide greater stability to states, allowing them to focus supplemental funding on the immediate needs of the child care sector as a whole, without depleting funds intended for ongoing program operation and improvement or compromising quality.

While the pandemic has revealed the cracks in the foundation of our child care system, it has also brought into stark relief how essential it is for the future success of our country. In addition to our FY2023 appropriations requests, we look forward to working with Congress as we seek to address these systemic issues and enact meaningful, sustainable solutions that meet the needs of America's working families. We appreciate the bipartisan support Congress has demonstrated for early learning and care in the past, and we hope to continue to work with you to support increased investments in high-quality care as the appropriations process moves forward.

Sincerely,

Afterschool Alliance

America Forward

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees

American Federation of Teachers
Bank Street College - Education Center
Center for Law and Social Policy
Child Care Aware of America
Child Care Services Association/T.E.A.C.H. National Center
Community Change Action
Council for Professional Recognition
Early Care and Education Consortium
Early Edge California
Educare Learning Network
Family Values @ Work
First 5 California
First Five Years Fund
First Focus Campaign for Children
Institute for Childhood Preparedness
Jumpstart
Low Income Investment Fund
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
National Association of Counties
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
National Head Start Association
National Women's Law Center
Parents as Teachers National Center
Save the Children
Service Employees International Union
Start Early
Teaching Strategies
The Arc of the United States
YWCA USA
ZERO TO THREE