

March 20, 2023

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

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
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 Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Capito
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 Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Baldwin, and Ranking Member Capito:

We write to encourage your continued support for the core federal early learning and care programs and ask you to build upon recent bipartisan investments to ensure more children and families receive access to the high-quality care they need. To support these needs and the many other needs of the very same families, we urge you to increase the overall FY 2024 allocation for the Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee to a level that ensures robust and sustained investments. 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 and prioritization of increased funding for federal early learning programs in recent years. This funding has helped extend the reach of state and federal programs to serve more families and improve the overall quality of care. Unfortunately, the needs of working families continue to be great. At the current funding levels core federal programs reach just a fraction of eligible families, leaving far too many struggling to find and afford high-quality care that meets their needs.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly half of families lived in a child care desert, making it extremely difficult to find the care they needed to work. Today, according to the latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the child care sector is still down approximately 60,000 jobs from pre-pandemic levels, so families are left with an even smaller supply of care as nearly all other sectors have completely recovered. While critical federal pandemic relief provided additional support for the workforce and stabilization grants helped keep providers open and the sector afloat, it was temporary by design. As the expiration of these funds nears, now is the time to continue investments in core federal programs to increase the supply of child care and ensure

parents have a range of reliable options so they can work or attend school. We have seen what can happen when federal investments are made – care becomes more affordable for families and more children are served in high-quality settings. Additionally, state-federal partnerships have continued to gain momentum, spurring local investments, resulting in encouraging progress that can only continue with foundational commitments at the federal level. Now is the time to build upon federal investments to advance more early learning and care opportunities for families – anything short will surely move our tenuous system in reverse, holding back families and our economy.

The most recent data available indicate the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Head Start program serve just a fraction of eligible families – 15% of eligible families received a subsidy under CCDBG, and 36% and 11% of 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 initial and renewal grantees demonstrate that states have doubled down on using these funds to reach more children and foster parental choice, whether by shifting resources where they are most needed, like the early learning workforce, or realizing efficiencies within their existing systems made possible through strategic planning and partnerships.

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 must balance many competing priorities such as increasing payment rates, serving more children, and expanding eligibility, making for difficult decisions that come with tradeoffs.

The President’s FY2024 Budget includes discretionary funding increases for early learning and care programs. As a community, we request Congress provide:

- Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) – At least an additional \$4.38 billion (a total of at least \$12.4 billion), which will expand the base CCDBG budget to help grow the supply and availability of care for more families while supporting states in making targeted investments to their child care systems aligned with longer-term needs.
- Head Start – An additional \$5.47 billion (a total of \$17.47 billion) to sustain and support the Head Start workforce; provide flexibility to address local quality improvement

priorities; address the epidemic of childhood trauma; support the expansion of Early Head Start and Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships; and restore critical purchasing power while addressing deferred maintenance issues and facility constraints.

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – An additional \$392 million for early intervention services provided under IDEA Part C (bringing total funding to \$932 million) and \$82.6 million for preschool special education services under Part B, Section 619 (bringing total funding to \$502.6 million). Research has shown that the earlier provision of services leads to improved outcomes and can mitigate the need for more extensive services later in childhood. This funding is essential to ensure that young children with disabilities are ready to learn when they enter school.
- Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5) program – An additional \$185 million for the (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.

While the pandemic revealed cracks in the foundation of our early learning and care system, it also brought to light how essential it is for the future success of our country. In addition to our FY2024 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

All Our Kin

America Forward

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Caring Across Generations

Center for American Progress

Center for Law and Social Policy

Child Care Aware of America

Council for a Strong America

Council for Professional Recognition

Early Care & Education Consortium
Educare Learning Network
Family Values @ Work
Fight Crime: Invest In Kids
First Five Years Fund
First Focus Campaign for Children
Jewish Federations of North America
Jumpstart for Young Children
Kidango
Latinos for Education
Mission: Readiness
Mom Congress
MomsRising
National Association for Family Child Care
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment
National Child Care Association
National Children's Facilities Network
National Education Association
National Head Start Association
National Women's Law Center
New America Early & Elementary Education Policy Program
Parents as Teachers National Center
ReadyNation
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network
Start Early
Teaching Strategies
The Arc of the United States
YMCA of the USA
ZERO TO THREE