

March 20, 2024

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 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 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 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:

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we are writing to respectfully request your continued support for the core federal child care and early learning programs and ask you to build upon past bipartisan investments to ensure more children and families receive access to the high-quality services they need. 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. We urge you to increase the overall FY 2025 allocation for the Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee to a level that ensures robust and sustained investments. We greatly appreciate the bipartisan support and prioritization of increased funding for federal early learning programs in recent years, which has helped extend the reach of local, state, and federal programs to serve more families and improve the quality of care. Unfortunately, at the current funding levels, core federal programs continue to reach just a fraction of eligible families, leaving far too many struggling to find and afford quality care that meets their needs.

Because the pandemic shined a spotlight on the deep foundational flaws of our nation's child care system and the tremendous child care challenges facing families today, there is now a broader understanding and recognition of the significant toll it is taking on families, providers, and employers, and our nation's economy. The high cost of child care is a tremendous burden for working families, and keeps quality programs out of reach for many. In addition to high costs, nearly half of families live in child care deserts where there is insufficient supply to meet demand, making it difficult to find the care necessary to go to work. Plagued by low wages, the child care workforce continues to struggle from high turnover, making it difficult to build the

supply of quality care. Pandemic relief funds successfully increased access to affordable child care, stabilized child care worker employment, raised wages for child care workers, and boosted labor force participation in a time of crisis. This demonstrates how families, child care workers, and the economy benefit with robust investment. Additionally, state-federal partnerships have continued to gain momentum, spurring local investments, resulting in encouraging progress that can only continue with foundational support from the federal level. As the last of relief funds expire, now is the time to build upon investments to the core federal early learning and care programs and advance opportunities for families – anything short will surely move our tenuous system in reverse, holding back families and our economy.

Current funding levels are insufficient to meet the needs of eligible families. The most recent data available indicate that the two primary federal early learning and care programs, Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Head Start, serve just a fraction of eligible families. In almost all states, CCDBG reaches less than 15% of eligible children, and Head Start and Early Head Start reach only 33% and 10% of those who qualify, respectively. Additionally, 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, which has caused financial constraints at the state level that have impacted access to services to young children with disabilities. Lastly, 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 children in low-income families and children with disabilities, improve compensation 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, but when faced with limited funds, states must balance many competing priorities such as increasing payment rates to providers, serving more children, and expanding eligibility, making for difficult decisions that come with tradeoffs.

As a community, we request consideration for the following discretionary funding increases from Congress in the FY25 Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee Appropriations bill:

- **Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)** – At least an additional \$4.3 billion for CCDBG (a total of at least \$12.4 billion), which will expand the base CCDBG budget to sustain some of the meaningful benefits states experienced with stabilization funding and support states in making targeted investments to their child care systems

aligned with longer-term needs. Additional funding will allow states to provide more families with subsidies, support and retain the child care workforce, and increase access, and supply. We must put the program on a more stable foundation as relief funding expires.

- **Head Start** – At least an additional \$4.5 billion for Head Start (a total of at least \$16.48 billion) which includes 3- through 5-year-old Head Start, prenatal to 3-year-old Early Head Start, Migrant & Seasonal prenatal through 5-year-old Head Start, and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start and Early Head Start. This investment is necessary to sustain and support the Head Start workforce, provide a cost of living adjustment in line with inflation; provide flexibility to address local quality improvement priorities, including deferred maintenance and childhood trauma issues; fund expansion of Head Start and Early Head Start, including through Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships; and allow for continued recruitment and development of staff for American Indian/Alaska Native programs. This funding would allow Head Start programs to fill vacant positions and open temporarily closed classrooms. It will also help facilitate implementation of new federal rule expected to be released later this year which are estimated by the Office of Head Start to cost programs \$1.6 billion for FY25 alone.
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C and Part B, Section 619** – An additional \$434.8 million for early intervention services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C (a total of \$974.8 million) and \$263.5 million for preschool special education services under Part B, Section 619 (a total of \$683.5 million). Federal investments in both the 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.
- **Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5)** – An additional \$185 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. PDG B-5 provides Congress with the unique opportunity to foster state-led early learning initiatives, helping them build strong, effective infrastructure of early learning and child care for working families that maximize parental choice. Nearly every governor applied for the most recent round of funds, with 42 states currently benefiting from the program. Continued funding will allow states to see the work they have started to fruition.
- **Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS)** – Robust funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, which helps low-income student parents enrolled in higher education access child care. CCAMPIS

provides child care services through students' own institution, by contracting with community partners, or by offering subsidies so parents can choose the child care provider that best meets their needs. More than 20% of all undergraduate students are raising children, but at current funding and award levels, the program is only able to support a very small fraction of the student parents who rely on child care to succeed in school.

In addition to our FY2025 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. As organizations dedicated to supporting and improving early learning and child care programs, we appreciate the bipartisan support Congress has demonstrated for these issues 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,

All Our Kin

America Forward

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Center for American Progress

Center for Law and Social Policy

Child Care Aware of America

Council for a Strong America

Council for Professional Recognition

Community Change Action

Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children

Early Care & Education Consortium

Educare Learning Network

Family Values @ Work

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

First Five Years Fund

First Focus Campaign for Children

Help Me Grow National Center

Higher Learning Advocates

Home Grown

IDEA Infant and Toddlers Coordinators Association
Jumpstart for Young Children
KinderCare Learning Companies
Mission: Readiness!
MomsRising
National Association for Family Childcare
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Head Start Association
National Women's Law Center
Neighborhood Villages
New America's Early & Elementary Education Policy program
Oxfam America
Parents as Teachers
ReadyNation
Save the Children
Service Employees International Union
Start Early
ZERO TO THREE