



APPROPRIATIONS: FY2026 Dear Colleague Letters

Each year, Members of Congress submit letters requesting robust funding for child care and early learning programs. Historically, letters requesting funding for child care have been bipartisan and incredibly popular. This year is no different, with a record number of freshman lawmakers and first time signers showing their support for our nation's child care programs.

For FY2026, 285 Members of Congress called for increased funding for federal early childhood education and care programs including 238 Democrats and 47 Republicans.

Some highlights:

Head Start

- The Republican Head Start letter had more signers (36) than in any of the past five years. 34% of them were first time signers.
- The Democratic Head Start letter also had unprecedented levels of support (185 overall) with 35 new signers, 18 of whom were freshman lawmakers.

Child Care Development Block Grants (CCDBG)

- 46% of the lawmakers who signed the Republican CCDBG letter were new signers, including six freshmen.
- 25% of the lawmakers who signed the Democratic CCDBG letter were new signers, including 19 freshmen.

Overall

- This year, 39 total freshmen members (33 members of the House and 6 Senators) signed onto appropriations letters relating to early learning and care.
- In May, First Five Years Fund (FFYF) led a coalition of 147 national and state organizations in calling for increased funding for federal early learning and care programs.

The appropriations process is an important time for legislators to determine their priorities for the next fiscal year. Congress uses this process to allocate funding for federal programs, activities and priorities.

Seven "Dear Colleague" letters were circulated in total calling for support of increased funding for the core federal early learning and care programs. Read the full details of each below:

FY26 Bipartisan Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Letter

- Led by Representatives Joaquin Castro (D-TX) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA)
- 93 signatures
- Ask: Fund the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) program at a level of at least \$500 million

FY26 Democrat Led Child Care & Development Block Grant Program (CCDBG) Letter

- Led by Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)
- 154 signatures
- Ask: Provide at least \$12.4 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG).

FY26 Republican Led Child Care & Development Block Grant Program (CCDBG) Letter

- Led by Representative Burgess Owens (R-UT)
- 35 signatures
- Ask: Provide robust funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG).

FY26 Democrat Led Head Start and Early Head Start Letter

- Led by Representative Jahana Hayes (D-CT)
- 188 signatures
- Ask: Provide \$14.91 billion for Head Start in FY2026.

FY26 Republican Led Head Start and Early Head Start Letter

- Led by Representative Pete Stauber (R-MN)
- 35 signatures
- Ask: Continue funding Head Start at the strongest level the Subcommittee deems possible.

Senate Democratic Dear Colleague Letter Supporting Funding for Early Care and Education

- Led by Sen. Tina Smith (D-MN)
- 41 signatures
- Provide the highest feasible funding for child care and early learning programs.

Senate Dear Colleague Letter Supporting Funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) in FY2026

- Led Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)

About First Five Years Fund

The first five years last forever. At First Five Years Fund, we work to protect, prioritize, and build bipartisan support for quality child care and early learning programs at the federal level. Reliable, affordable, and high-quality early learning and child care can be transformative, not only enhancing a child's prospects for a brighter future but also bolstering working parents and fostering economic stability nationwide. Join us at www.ffyf.org.