

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 21, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Capito and Ranking Member Baldwin:

We write to request that as you weigh difficult budget choices for the Fiscal Year 2027 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) appropriations bill, you provide the highest feasible funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start, Early Head Start, Preschool Development Grants, and early intervention services available through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C (Grants for Infants and Families) and Part B Section 619 (Preschool Grants). Together, these programs provide children with the early learning experiences they need to succeed in school, work and life, and support parents in their efforts to provide for their families.

Accordingly, we specifically request that the Fiscal Year 2027 appropriations bill provide the following:

- **Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG):** At least an additional \$3.57 billion (for a total of \$12.4 billion), which will expand the base CCDBG budget to help grow the supply and availability of care for more families.
- **Head Start/Early Head Start:** An additional \$1.91 billion (for a total of \$14.27 billion) to sustain and support the Head Start workforce, provide flexibility to address local quality improvement priorities, address incidents 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 \$434.8 million for early intervention services provided under IDEA Part C (for a total of \$974.8 million), and \$263 million for preschool special education services under Part B, Section 619 (for a total of \$683 million). This funding is essential to ensuring that young children with disabilities are ready to learn when they enter school.
- **Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5):** At least \$315 million to support states' and territories' efforts to increase the quality and efficiency of existing early learning programs and systems.

Funding for early care and education programs represents one of our greatest opportunities for a significant return on federal investments. Child care enables parents to work productively, contribute to our economy, and gain and maintain financial stability for their families. As affordability concerns continue to rise among working families, Congress can directly support families and help them keep more money in their pockets by providing additional federal funding for childhood. In addition, research has demonstrated that high-quality early childhood education is an effective strategy for improving the developmental outcomes and long-term success of children, especially for those from low-income families. Renowned economists, including Nobel Laureate James Heckman and former Federal Reserve economist Art Rolnick, have demonstrated that high-quality early education can produce up to \$16 in benefits for every \$1 spent.¹ This substantial return on investment is derived largely from long-term savings associated with a reduced need for special education, improved health outcomes, higher rates of high school and college graduation, decreased dependence on welfare programs, and increased workforce productivity of children who receive a high-quality early education.

Despite the promise of substantial returns, federal early childhood programs reach only a fraction of eligible children and families. Recent data show that only 17 percent of eligible families received a subsidy under CCDBG. Additionally, only 27 percent of eligible families had access to Head Start and 11 percent of eligible families had access to Early Head Start. Similarly, 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 both the number of children served and inflation. In addition to increasing families' access to these programs, federal funding also helps states that are working hard to improve the quality and reach of their child care and early learning programs through the PDG B-5 program.

These investments are crucial in light of recent uncertainty and shifting policy conditions, which have made it increasingly more difficult for child care and early learning programs to plan, operate, and serve families effectively. Programs rely on stable federal support to recruit and retain staff, maintain safe and quality environments, and ensure continuity of services for children and families. Recent disruptions, delays, and administrative challenges have strained already fragile systems and created instability for providers and the communities they serve. Robust funding for affordable child care and early childhood education is especially important to ensure that the families who rely on these services can continue to depend on them.

Quality, affordable child care and early childhood education remains out of reach for many families. In more than half of states, the average annual cost of full-time, center-based child care is more expensive than the average annual cost of in-state college tuition. Half of Americans live in places with a shortage of licensed child care providers or slots, which particularly affects rural populations. While workforce shortages have long been a challenge, they have only intensified in recent years. Now is the time to increase the federal investment in early care and education, to help all children achieve their full potential and alleviate the financial burdens on working families.

¹ Arthur Rolnick, "Investing in Early Childhood Development is Smart Economic Development," *The Science of Early Brain Development: A Foundation for the Success of Our Children and the State Economy*, Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars, 2014, https://evidence2impact.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/s_wifis32c01.pdf.

We are grateful for your work to provide sustained and bipartisan investments in child care in recent fiscal years. We were particularly pleased to see the large increases in CCDBG and Head Start funding appropriated for Fiscal Year 2024, and we appreciate the funding increases for most of these programs in Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026. Yet, further investments are critical to fully address gaps in the affordability, availability, and quality of child care. In recent years, the critical role of child care in supporting our economy and families' financial stability has become even more clear, as has the precarious state of the child care sector due to chronic underinvestment.

Underinvestment in child care not only limits opportunities for children, but also drives economic hardship for working parents (especially mothers), child care workers (who are primarily women), and employers who struggle to recruit and retain workers. Families are facing an even smaller supply of care options, and the sector needs sustained investments to continue building a more stable future. Child care is a crucial part of our economic infrastructure, and we need to treat it as such. Child care challenges for parents and caregivers in the workforce cost the economy an estimated \$172 billion each year. It is estimated that families lose \$134 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue, while productivity problems associated with child care challenges cost employers \$38 billion annually.

Improving the long-term outcomes of our nation's most vulnerable children is crucial to the future health of our economy. Investing in high-quality early care and education is a proven strategy for achieving this goal, and it is vital that all children are able to benefit from these key early learning opportunities. We therefore ask that you support increased funding for CCDBG, Head Start and Early Head Start, and PDG B-5 so that children and families continue to have access to affordable, high-quality early education options and states can continue to work towards improving the quality of their early childhood education systems. We also ask that you continue to support increased funding for Part C and Part B Section 619 of IDEA, which support critical early intervention services for infants and toddlers.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[[SIGNATURES]]