120TH CONGRESS

A Child Care & Early Learning Agenda

FIRST FIVE YEARS FUND

Congress has an opportunity to make progress on multiple fronts on child care, from immediately addressing specific challenges to advancing sweeping comprehensive reforms.

Ensuring Families Have Affordable Options

For families across the country, the cost of everyday life is increasingly difficult to manage. This "affordability anxiety" is especially acute for parents of young children, for whom child care is one of the largest and most unavoidable expenses, competing with groceries, rent, health care, and other essentials. These rising costs shape fundamental decisions about whether parents can work, how many hours they can work, and even whether they can afford to grow their families.

Congress can change this.

The recent election underscored the demand for meaningful solutions to the affordability pressures facing families, and national polling reinforces that message: eight in ten voters say child care is part of the ongoing affordability crisis and they want Congress to act. Affordable, quality child care is essential to the wellbeing of families and the strength of our economy. Two-thirds of children ages five and under need care because all available adults in their household are working, yet too many families struggle to find and afford the care that meets their needs and fits their budgets. There simply aren't enough options, and the ones that exist are entirely too expensive.

There is universal agreement around the problem, and there is widespread, urgent support for Congress to do something about it. The 120th Congress has an opportunity to respond to that call by advancing meaningful solutions that help make child care more affordable and accessible for families while strengthening the workforce, supporting employers, and growing our economy.

An All-Of-The-Above Strategy

There is no lack of viable options, and Congress has an opportunity to make progress on multiple fronts, from immediately addressing specific challenges to advancing sweeping comprehensive reforms. First Five Years Fund (FFYF) supports an "all-of-the-above" approach to achieving our shared goals of ensuring families in America have the options that work for them while keeping child development at the center.

We support the many pathways that help reach that goal, including:

- **Strengthening trusted federal programs,** including tax provisions, and prioritizing investments in them;
- **Identifying pathways** to ensure families have affordable, quality options;
- **Expanding the supply of child care** while attracting a well-qualified child care workforce;
- **Ensuring more children have access** to the quality care and early learning opportunities that help prepare them for school.

Families can't simply push pause on their child care needs; they need support now. By building on proven programs and pursuing new opportunities, Congress can help ensure more families have options that meet their needs, while supporting children, strengthening the workforce, and growing our economy.

120th Congress

Centering Trusted Federal Programs

Existing federal programs provide the foundation for child care in this nation and can be strengthened to better meet the needs of families today. These proven programs support hard-working families, businesses, and local economies in all 50 states and help target support to the unique needs of states and local communities. These programs benefit millions of children each year and serve as the bedrock of our state and local systems, yet they reach only a fraction of those who are eligible. Improving and continuing to invest in these programs would make a meaningful difference for families, children, and communities immediately.

- **Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG):** A block grant to states that helps low-income working families afford their choice of care and early learning (including center-based, faith-based, or home-based);
- **Early Head Start/Head Start:** A federally funded, locally designed program that delivers comprehensive early learning, health, nutrition, and family support services for young children living in poverty and their families;
- **Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5):** A federal program that helps states build stronger child care systems, utilize reliable data, better coordinate programs, and strengthen infrastructure;
- **Child Care-Related Tax Provisions:** Tax benefits that help families offset child care costs and incentivize employers to provide or support child care for their employees;
- **Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program (MIECHV):** A voluntary federal program that pairs families with trained home visitors such as nurses, social workers, and educators.

Seizing Opportunities to Ensure Families Have Options for Affordable, Quality Care

There are unique child care challenges that have gained awareness and momentum over the past several years. They also serve as an opportunity to provide immediate support to families, providers, and communities. These range across multiple committee jurisdictions in Congress and often have bipartisan and/or bicameral support. In many respects, these arose from conversations Members of Congress have had with constituents, including addressing after-hours care, meeting the needs of rural communities, investing in training and early educator apprenticeship programs, leveraging the tax code to offset costs to parents and incentivize employers, and modernizing existing programs to meet families' needs today, such as through the Child Care Modernization Act. This list is just a starting point for tackling tangible challenges and demonstrating meaningful progress toward meeting the needs of families with young children.

In Conclusion

First Five Years Fund works with federal policymakers across political parties to provide resources, expertise, and information around child care and early learning. As the 120th Congress gets underway, FFYF looks forward to working with Members and staff to build consensus and advance the practical, bipartisan solutions that deliver meaningful progress for families, children, and communities nationwide.

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, 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.

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