

August 30, 2016

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
135 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

We are writing regarding early childhood education programs in the Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations process. We work in states and communities to improve the lives of children, especially those experiencing poverty. As such we see the difference access to high-quality early childhood education and child care opportunities makes to improve the education, health, and economic outcomes of our nation's children on a daily basis. Today, we are writing to thank you for recognizing the paramount importance of access to high-quality early care and learning experiences through your bipartisan support for increased federal investments in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. While both the FY2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations (Labor/HHS) House and Senate bills build on FY2016 levels with increases for some early childhood education programs, the proposed levels will still likely result in fewer children and prevent many children, particularly those from low-income families, from having the chance to participate in the high-quality early learning experiences they need. While we strongly support robust and comprehensive early childhood investments that include the Preschool Development Grants, IDEA Grants for Infants and Families and IDEA Preschool Grants, we are taking this opportunity to particularly call your attention to the urgent and unmet needs of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start and Early Head Start.

Access to a high-quality early childhood education helps children from low-income families enter kindergarten prepared to learn, closes achievement gaps, and offers increased opportunities for a better future. Research shows that children from low-income families who participate in high-quality early learning programs are more likely to earn higher wages, live healthier lives, avoid incarceration, and raise stronger families. Investments in high-quality early childhood education and child care programs have proven positive impacts on individuals and society through reduced healthcare costs, increased school achievement, and a more educated workforce. As organizations who see firsthand how critical

these federal funds are to the children in our states we strongly advocate for the following funding levels in a final FY2017 bill:

Child Care and Development Block Grant

In November 2014, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act was reauthorized with bipartisan support for the first time in 18 years. CCDBG provides critical supports to working families, while promoting the healthy development of children, and recognizing the meaningful role child care providers play in children's successful growth. In order to improve the quality of child care programs, the reauthorized law includes reforms aimed at promoting family involvement, strengthening health and safety standards, improving training for the child care workforce, enhancing continuity of care, and increasing the percentage of children from low-income families in high-quality programs. Given that champions on both sides of the aisle came together to support the reauthorization of CCDBG, bipartisan support for federal funding to help realize the reforms envisioned in the reauthorized law are equally important.

Specifically, we urge you to significantly increase funding for CCDBG above the levels included in both the FY2017 House and Senate Labor/HHS bills (\$40 million and \$25 million above the FY2016 level respectively). An increase of \$1.2 billion above the funding level provided for CCDBG in FY2016 will help states implement the quality improvements put forth in the Act, leading to better outcomes for children from low-income families. States are struggling with the cost of implementing the critically important reforms included in CCDBG reauthorization. This level will enable states to provide children and families access to high-quality child care without being forced to reduce the already shrinking numbers of children who receive child care assistance or reduce payments to child care providers. We believe the reforms Congress passed into law hold great promise, but are concerned that without a significant increase in funding the goals of CCDBG reauthorization will go unfulfilled and working parents will find it even more challenging to obtain the help in paying for child care that they need to find and keep a job to support their children.

Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start deliver comprehensive early learning, health, nutrition and family support services to low-income expectant families and children from birth to age five. Head Start has served over 32 million children and families in communities across the country since 1965, and continues to serve over a million children every year. Despite the many who benefit from Head Start the need still far outweighs the current supply. As of 2013, only 42% of eligible 3- and 4-year-olds participate in Head Start, and only 4% of eligible infants and toddlers participate in Early Head Start. Although programs maintain current waitlists, many families remain unserved given how long it takes for slots to become available. Head Start programs promote the school readiness of young children from low-income families by supporting their comprehensive development. Increased investments in Head Start is critical to ensure that more eligible children develop the skills that will foster their success once they transition to elementary school.

Last year the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services proposed a comprehensive revision of the Head Start Performance Standards to improve the quality of Head Start services; streamline and

reorganize program requirements to make it easier to operate a high-quality Head Start program; and reduce the bureaucratic burden on local programs. To address the financial implication of implementing revised performance standards, the President's FY2017 budget proposal calls for an increase of \$434 million for Head Start programs. The President's FY2017 budget proposal also seeks to build on FY2016 funding that was specifically dedicated to enabling more Head Start programs to offer services for more hours per day and days per year. We firmly support the proposal to extend the Head Start day and year. Access to full-day, full-year services increases learning time in high-quality programs and therefore improves the likelihood of successful outcomes. However, increasing the number of annual hours Head Start programs can provide services, should be balanced with increased investments to ensure programs can continue to provide high-quality early learning and comprehensive supports while strengthening the early childhood workforce.

While we appreciate your commitment to increased investments in Head Start in FY2016, we hope that you will continue to build on the FY2016 level in a final FY2017 bill. Specifically, we urge you to significantly increase funding for Head Start above the \$141.63 million increase included in the FY2017 House Labor/HHS bill. While this increase represents a first step toward providing the resources needed, additional investment will be necessary to ensure expanded access to high-quality Head Start services to the children with the greatest need. An increase of \$434 million will help to strengthen the capacity of programs to implement Head Start Performance Standards in the coming year, and support quality improvements in programs, such as full-day and full-year services. Additionally, we support increases above the current funding level for Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, which have shown positive and comprehensive impacts in states and communities by assisting in the expansion of high-quality early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers.

Preschool Development Grants

The recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) highlights the growing momentum toward bringing states, school districts, and community-based partners together to better integrate early learning with K-12 education. Working in this way will improve supports for our youngest learners as they transition from early childhood education settings to the elementary school classroom. Specifically, ESSA recognizes the importance of a continuum of learning throughout the law and makes clear that a child's path toward college and career readiness begins with a high-quality early childhood education. This is particularly clear in that ESSA authorizes a new Preschool Development Grants (PDG) program within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The new PDGs will build on the "legacy" program to help support access to high-quality preschool opportunities for children, while emphasizing coordination and expansion of early learning services.

The current PDG grantees are working in over 200 communities to expand access to high-quality preschool opportunities in 18 states. We want to thank you for your support of \$250 million in both the FY2017 House and Senate bills for PDGs, which will sustain the fourth and final year of the "legacy" program and efforts already underway to improve quality and access to high-quality preschool on the ground in these states. As ESSA authorizes a new vision for the PDGs, we request that you consider providing sufficient resources to allow for a new competition for PDGs to improve collaboration and coordination among early childhood programs at the state and local level. Additionally, this would

support quality improvement activities, laying the foundation for states that receive grants to increase access to high-quality early education programs in future years.

Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities

Early intervention (EI) services assist infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities. Under the Grants for Infants and Families program, Part C of IDEA, states implement systems of coordinated, comprehensive, multidisciplinary, interagency programs and make EI services available to children with disabilities, aged birth through 2, and their families. EI services can lead to more effective supports for children with disabilities and their families beginning in the early developmental years thus potentially reducing the need for costlier supports in later years.

We request that you consider providing additional resources for this program beyond maintaining funding at the FY2016 level, as in both the FY2017 House and Senate Labor/HHS bills. An increase in FY2017 funding could potentially support incentive grants to states, in addition to other EI initiatives. These state incentive grants will enable parents of children with disabilities to continue receiving EI services for their children until they are eligible to enter elementary school. The continuation of EI, when implemented well, provides for a seamless transition between services provided at the very first stages of a child's development into early education and then elementary school.

Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities

A key requirement of the Special Education Preschool Grants, Part B of IDEA (Part B), is that to be eligible to receive funding states must provide a required assurance to the U.S. Department of Education that they are offering a free appropriate public education to all children with disabilities aged 3 through 5. Currently, every state has provided that assurance and in FY2015 over 753,000 children with disabilities received access to services across the country.

Additionally, the Part B program supports the inclusion of young children with disabilities in state and federal early learning programs such as Head Start and CCDBG. As this is the only federal program dedicated to preschool-aged children with disabilities, we request that you consider providing an increase in funding for Part B to allow for an increase in the federal share per child and assist states in ensuring that all children with disabilities aged 3 through 5 have access to preschool opportunities.

We want to once again thank you for your bipartisan work to increase federal resources for our youngest learners and their families in past appropriations bills. We strongly urge you to build on these past efforts by providing the highest feasible funding levels for the above programs as you work to finalize the FY2017 appropriations process. We must ensure that every child in this country, especially those from low-income families, has access to high-quality early childhood education and child care opportunities to prepare them to develop the skills needed to enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed in life.

Sincerely,