October 31, 2015

The Honorable Rick Snyder
Governor of Michigan
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear Governor Snyder:

The undersigned organizations applaud Michigan's focus to ensure children have a great start in life, as demonstrated by our investments in the Great Start Readiness Program, evidence-based home visiting, and early literacy programming. We also recognize that many Michigan children continue to be at-risk of beginning school underprepared as a result of challenges they face well-before four years of age. In recognition of this, we are writing to ask for your support to allocate state funds for Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) known in Michigan as *Early On*.

Annually, *Early On* provides specialized early intervention services and supports to approximately 18,000 infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays, and their families. While federal funds provide limited support to the Part C system, IDEA did not intend to fund direct services primarily with federal dollars. Unlike the majority of other states, Michigan does not allocate any state funding for Part C, leaving the system vastly underfunded. In fact, these services are funded at 5% of the level of similar programs in peer states throughout the nation at the detriment to children and families. An audit conducted by the Michigan Office of the Auditor General concluded that there are deficiencies in the system and that additional funding is necessary for the early intervention system to adequately find, evaluate, serve, and support infants, toddlers, and their families.

We know that you are well-aware of the brain science in early childhood. Investing in services for young children who have or are at-risk for developmental delays not only better meets children's special needs from an early age, but also reduces special education costs down the road. In fact, national estimates indicate that of all young children who receive appropriate early intervention services, 37% of those children will not need special education services when they enter preschool and 42% will not need special education services by the time they reach kindergarten. If Michigan could realize these types of returns on *Early On*, we could not only save significant special education dollars but our investments in the Great Start Readiness Program and efforts to improve third grade reading will go even further. And, state funding for *Early On* would enable Michigan to address the deficiencies found by the Michigan Auditor General so that all families with eligible infants and toddlers receive timely, appropriate early intervention services.

Now is the time to bolster supports for Michigan's infants and toddlers with disabilities and delays so that they may be successful in school and in life. We need to follow in the footsteps of the majority of other states and begin providing state resource to support *Early On.* It's a critical step to make Michigan a top ten education state in the next ten years. Please continue to be the Governor who supports early childhood by supporting *Early On*; it is the next logical step.