

October , 2015

Dear :

Child care and early learning opportunities are essential for our states' and communities' children, families, and economies. Access to high-quality early childhood education and care helps children succeed in their school careers and in life in addition to helping their parents work. Yet far too many children do not have access to high-quality early learning programs and too many parents lack the child care they need to get and keep their jobs. We appreciate that both the House and Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bills for FY 2016 provide modest additional funding for some early childhood programs, but the current gaps in our states merit a much more robust investment. Specifically, we urge you to support increases of at least \$370 million for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), \$1.52 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start, \$500 million for Preschool Development Grants, \$65 million for Grants for Infants and Families (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and \$50 million for Preschool Grants (Part B, Section 619 under IDEA). In order to make these investments possible, we also urge you to raise the sequester cap for non-defense discretionary (NDD) spending.

Child Care and Development Block Grant

We were enthusiastic about the bipartisan reauthorization of CCDBG that was enacted in November 2014. However, without significant new funding to implement the essential reforms included in the reauthorization, states may be forced to make difficult decisions such as potentially cutting the number of children receiving child care assistance or reducing payments to already low-paid child care providers. Federal and state child care spending has fallen to an 11-year low and the number of children receiving assistance is at a 16-year low. Just between 2006 and 2014, over 360,000 children lost federal child care assistance. The lack of sufficient federal funding has also affected state policy choices—for example, only one state reimburses child care providers who serve children receiving child care assistance at the federally recommended level. An increase in CCDBG funding would help stem the loss of children receiving child care assistance and expand support to providers serving these children, while allowing states to achieve the new law's important goals of protecting children's health and safety in child care, improving the quality of care, and make it easier for struggling families to apply for and retain their child care assistance.

Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start provide comprehensive early care and education for children birth to age five and their families to help prepare children for school. The program is intended to

serve our lowest-income children and families, yet Head Start serves less than half of eligible preschoolers and Early Head Start serves less than 5 percent of eligible infants and toddlers. In addition, many children participating in Head Start and Early Head Start are in programs that do not operate for the full-school-day, full-school-year schedule that offers more support to working families and a more intensive early education experience for their children. Our budget request would enable programs to begin to address rising costs and expand access to full-school-day, full-school-year services, which research demonstrates is a critical element of ensuring quality. Additional funding for Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care partnerships—which help child care providers meet Early Head Start’s higher-quality standards—would address the enormous unmet need for high-quality early care and education for our youngest and most vulnerable children.

Preschool Development Grants

Preschool Development Grants are supporting state-led efforts to both offer preschool and to improve the quality of that experience for four-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families. Currently, fewer than three in 10 four-year-olds participate in a high-quality preschool program. Forty states recognized the need to expand or strengthen their preschool efforts and applied for these grants last year but only 18 received grants. Without funding to maintain their efforts, the 18 states would be forced to eliminate the preschool classrooms they have worked so hard to open and additional states will not have an opportunity to move their early learning efforts forward.

Preschool Grants and Grants for Infants and Families

The Grants for Infants and Families (IDEA Part C) program helps guarantee that infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families receive the early intervention services they need to identify and address their special needs. Additional funding for this program will allow states to sustain access to these essential services.

Similarly, the Preschool Grants program (IDEA Part B, Section 619) enhances the accessibility of special education for children ages three through five with disabilities. With an increase in funding, states will be able to expand these services for children who need them.

There is widespread agreement among state policy leaders, the business community, law enforcement officials, military leaders, parents, and researchers that early learning is one of the best investments that the country can make in its current and future workforce. In order to ensure that our states can build on the steps that Congress has already taken to strengthen these programs and to avoid any loss of these vital supports, we urge you to provide the increases that we propose. Clearly, Congress should raise the NDD caps to ensure that the investments in early learning do not require reducing funding for other programs that also provide help to families.

Sincerely,