

May 02, 2025

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Shelley Capito
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Chair Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Capito, and Ranking Member Baldwin:

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we are writing to respectfully request your continued support for increased federal investments for core federal child care and early learning programs and ask you to build upon past support to ensure more children and families receive access to the high-quality services they need. Child care and early learning programs play a crucial role in supporting children's healthy development, learning, and school readiness, while also supporting parents' ability to work, train, or pursue an education. We greatly appreciate the bipartisan support and prioritization of increased funding for federal early learning programs in recent years, which has helped extend the reach of local, state, and federal programs to serve more families and improve the quality of care. Unfortunately, at the current funding levels, core federal programs continue to reach just a fraction of eligible families, leaving far too many struggling to find and afford quality care that meets their needs.

Our nation's child care challenges are taking a significant toll on parents, providers, employers, and our nation's economy. The high cost of child care is an extraordinary burden for working families, and keeps quality programs out of reach for many. In addition to high costs, nearly half of families live in child care deserts where there is insufficient supply to meet demand, making it difficult to find the care necessary to go to work. Additionally the child care workforce is plagued by low wages, contributing to high turnover, and making it difficult to build the supply of quality care across the country.

The most recent data available indicate that the two primary federal early learning and care programs, Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Head Start, serve just a fraction of eligible families. Of the nearly 6.3 million children ages 5 and under whose families qualify for CCDBG, fewer than 840,000 receive it (or approximately 13%). That number drops to 26% for Head Start and is at 10% of eligible children served in Early Head Start. Additionally, 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 the number of children served, as well as the cost of inflation. Consequently, both programs have experienced significant erosion of funding over the last two decades, which has caused financial constraints at the state level that have impacted access to services to young children with disabilities. Lastly, the Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5) program continues to offer states a unique opportunity to inventory the availability and quality of programs, while thinking strategically about how to optimize federal and state funding streams. Current and proposed activities demonstrate that states have doubled down on using these funds to reach more children and foster parental choice, whether by shifting resources where they are most needed, like the early learning workforce, or realizing efficiencies within their existing systems made possible through strategic planning and partnerships.

Annual appropriations allow these programs to continue to provide sustained services to children in low-income families and children with disabilities, improve recruitment and retention of a talented workforce, and meet their statutory and regulatory requirements. For example, a portion of CCDBG funds must be used for quality improvement, but when faced with limited funds, states must balance many competing priorities such as increasing payment rates to providers, serving more children, and expanding eligibility, making for difficult decisions that come with tradeoffs.

Therefore, we request consideration for the following discretionary funding increases from Congress in the FY26 Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee Appropriations bill:

- **Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)** – At least an additional \$3.65 billion for CCDBG (a total of at least \$12.4 billion), which will expand the base CCDBG budget and support states in making targeted investments to their child care systems aligned with longer-term needs. In half the states, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) reaches less than 13% of eligible children. Additional funding will allow states to provide more families with vouchers, support and retain the child care workforce, and increase access, and options for parents
- **Head Start** – An additional \$1.94 billion for Head Start (a total of at least \$14.91 billion). This investment is necessary to provide a cost of living adjustment in line with inflation; fund the demonstrated need for Head Start and the expansion of Early Head Start, including the Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships; allow programs to address pressing local needs; and support long overdue renovation, maintenance, and repair of facilities.

- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C and Part B, Section 619** – At least an additional \$434.8 million for early intervention services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C (a total of \$974.8 million) and at least an additional \$263.5 million for preschool special education services under Part B, Section 619 (a total of \$683.5 million). Federal investments in both the IDEA Part C infant and toddler program and Part B, Section 619 preschool program have failed to match increases in the number of children served, as well as the cost of inflation. Consequently, both programs have experienced significant erosion of funding over the last two decades, which has caused financial constraints at the state level that have impacted access to services for children with disabilities.
- **Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5)** – Robust funding for the Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5) program to continue the work underway in states' and territories' on increasing the quality and efficiency of existing early learning programs and systems, while thinking strategically about how to optimize federal and state funding streams. Through PDG B-5, Congress has the unique opportunity to foster state-led early learning initiatives, helping states build a strong, effective infrastructure of early learning and child care for working families. Nearly every governor across the country has supported and approved state applications for this funding.
- **Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS)** – Robust funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, which helps low-income student parents enrolled in higher education access child care. CCAMPIS provides child care services through students' own institution, by contracting with community partners, or by offering subsidies so parents can choose the child care provider that best meets their needs. More than 20% of all undergraduate students are raising children, but at current funding and award levels, the program is only able to support a very small fraction of the student parents who rely on child care to succeed in school.

In addition to our FY2026 appropriations requests, we look forward to working with Congress as we seek to address these systemic issues and enact meaningful, sustainable solutions that meet the needs of America's working families. As organizations dedicated to supporting and improving early learning and child care programs, we appreciate the bipartisan support Congress has demonstrated for these issues in the past, and we hope to continue to work with you to support increased investments in high-quality care as the appropriations process moves forward.

Sincerely,

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

BridgeCare

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Child Care Aware of America (CCAoA)
ChildCareOwner.com
Council for Professional Recognition
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for
Exceptional Children (DEC)
Early Care & Education Consortium
Early Care & Education Pathways to Success
(ECEPTS)
Early Childhood Education Consortium
Educare Learning Network
First Five Years Fund (FFYF)
Home Grown
Lightbridge Academy
Longleaf Strategies
Moms First
National Association for the Education of Young
Children
National CACFP Association
National Child Care Association
National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
(NECPA)
National Farm to School Network
National Head Start Association
National Women's Law Center Action Fund
New America's Early & Elementary Education
Policy Program
ReadyNation
ResourceFull Consulting LLC
Rural America Initiatives Head Start
Save the Children
Small Business Majority
The Compliance Alliance
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