

March 11, 2020

Dear Members of Congress,

As early childhood education organizations, we are pleased to see Congress taking swift action to support families and industries impacted by the public health crisis resulting from the spread of COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus, and request significant attention to and investment in the child care and early learning sector as part of this action. While federal support is required for paid leave, nutrition, and other vital community services, we write to highlight the specific needs of child care and early learning programs operating in all states and across all settings.

Child care is the backbone of our nation's economy; without it, millions of parents cannot go to work or attend school, and the U.S. economy suffers billions of dollars in losses. The spread of COVID-19 threatens this system on multiple fronts, as nearly 2 million early childhood educators are trying to effectively and safely care for and educate children, meet the needs of families, protect staff, and cover all of the expenses required to keep their doors open. Child care programs in every state already operate on razor thin margins and teeter on the edge of financial health. Issues that may appear temporary—for instance when children are absent and providers are not reimbursed, or when programs have to pay substitutes to cover for sick staff members—could cause widespread permanent closures and result in catastrophic impacts on children, families, businesses and our economy in the short and long term.

We urge Congress to provide significant and flexible emergency funding that will allow child care and Head Start programs to weather this growing public health and economic crisis, and preserve the nation's supply of family child care and community-based child care programs. In previous recovery packages, Congress has recognized the importance of early childhood education programs to the nation's economy by providing dedicated funding for child care and early learning programs, including the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start, and Early Head Start, helping to stabilize these critical programs. We recommend Congress move quickly to make similar direct investments this year to secure the future of children and families in our country.

Specifically, we request Congress provide robust flexible emergency funding that does not require a state match to help families and providers address the impacts of COVID-19. Allowable uses of this funding should be based on what providers and parents need in their community, and should *at a minimum* include:

- Providing direct assistance to programs based on enrollment, not attendance;
- Providing payments to programs and workers in the case of COVID-19 related closures, including back-up care;
- Providing payments to programs to continue to serve children when parents or caregivers experience an inability to make co-payments or pay tuition;
- Covering the cost of substitute educators; and

- Purchasing additional supplies or services necessary to keeping centers and homes safe and sanitary and provide necessary training for staff in all relevant languages.

In addition, Congress should make clear that within current law, states should take all steps practicable to help manage this crisis by requiring the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to issue guidance to states informing them of existing flexibilities under CCDBG and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) that can be used to support families, educators, and providers during this public health crisis, while continuing to ensure children are cared for in healthy, safe environments. Similarly, guidance should be issued for Head Start and Early Head Start programs that provides flexibility around attendance, enrollment, and staff compensation during emergency program closures, as has occurred previously.

This funding and guidance is essential to ensuring children, workers, and families are healthy and safe; parents are able to go to work; family child care homes and child care centers stay in business; members of the early childhood education workforce receive the financial security they need; and states have the resources to respond to rapidly-changing needs and emergency closures.

Early childhood education programs are essential for the millions of children and families they serve, and are particularly crucial during emergency public health and economic crises. But their success is contingent upon receiving the robust investment they need to take necessary steps and precautions. We urge lawmakers to act swiftly to allocate substantial emergency flexible funding directly to the child care and early learning systems in this country.

Sincerely,

African American Health Alliance
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
All Our Kin
Caring Across Generations
Center for American Progress
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Child Care Aware of America
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Defense Fund
Coalition on Human Needs
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC)
Early Care and Education Consortium
Educare Learning Network
Every Child Matters
Family Values @ Work
First Five Years Fund

First Focus Campaign for Children
Forum for Youth Investment
Indivisible
Kairos: The Center for Religions, Rights and Social Justice
Main Street Alliance
MomsRising
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
National Head Start Association
National Indian Child Care Association
National Women's Law Center
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Restaurant Opportunities Center United
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network (SCAN)
SchoolHouse Connection
Service Employees International Union
Teaching Strategies
The Ounce of Prevention Fund
United Way Worldwide
Voices for Progress
YWCA USA
ZERO TO THREE