

November 21, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman and Ranking Members:

As organizations concerned with children and families, we urge you to provide sequester relief in time to finalize Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 funding bills in December. Otherwise, non-defense discretionary (NDD) caps will be cut by \$2.9 billion, which on top of a \$12.8 billion shortfall in non-defense discretionary funding due to revised fee estimates and required spending over which Congress has little control, will result in non-defense discretionary programs having to absorb total cuts of \$15.7 billion dollars below the FY 2017 level, or roughly a 3 percent reduction. NDD programs such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Head Start provide American children and their families with the resources they need to live healthy, stable, and secure lives. These and other programs, including nutrition, education, health, labor and transportation programs, bolster the economy, drive the United States' global competitiveness, and support citizens' well-being. We urge Congress to craft a budget deal that provides sequester relief for NDD equal to that for defense, thereby upholding the parity principle established in the two previous budget deals. Further, subcommittees should receive subsequent increases in their allocations commensurate to the size of their bills, so that programs can adequately serve children and working families. Likewise, we urge that any offsets do not harm children and vulnerable Americans by short-changing other important entitlements that ensure nutrition, health care, and other essential services.

With increased allocations for NDD programs, we urge you to prioritize investments in key early childhood programs as you complete the FY 2018 appropriations process. High-quality child care and early education is essential to children's success as adults and as our future workers. And stable child care is crucial for the parents in our current workforce. Yet, the high cost of child care strains families' budgets and makes it extremely challenging for them to afford nurturing and supportive arrangements for their children.

We ask that you support substantial new funding in a final appropriations bill for FY 2018 to address children and families' urgent unmet needs for child care and early education opportunities through the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start, Early Head Start, and other early childhood programs. Funding for these programs should be increased beyond the amounts included in the current Senate and House Labor, Human Services, and Education appropriations bills.

Child Care and Development Block Grant

When Congress, on a bipartisan basis, reauthorized the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) in 2014, it gave a clear signal about the importance of safe and supportive child care to helping low-income parents work and support their families and to giving children a good start.

To ensure the important reforms in the CCDBG reauthorization law can be implemented without reducing families' access to child care assistance, a significant increase in funding for CCDBG is necessary in FY 2018. The number of children receiving child care assistance has already declined by 373,000 children between FY 2006 and FY 2015 due to stagnant funding. Only one in six children eligible for federal child care assistance receives it. In addition, most states pay inadequate rates to child care providers serving families receiving assistance, which leaves child care programs struggling to keep their doors open and staff without the income they need to support their own families. In order to ensure that parents can participate in the workforce and support their children and that providers can remain in the field, we urge the Committee to include a major increase in funding for CCDBG.

Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start offer early learning, health, nutrition, and family support services to low-income families and children birth to age five. The programs take a comprehensive two-generation approach to meeting the needs of the whole child and the whole family. Services are targeted and diverse in order to respond to each family's individualized needs. This localized method of service delivery supports stability and long-term success for the families who are most at risk. Despite the important supports the programs provide for children and their families, only about half of eligible three- and four-year-olds are able to participate in Head Start, and only about 7 percent of eligible infants and toddlers are able to participate in Early Head Start due to limited funding.

Last year, new Head Start Performance Standards were finalized, with the goal of helping Head Start grantees operate high-quality programs and better meet the needs of working families. To enable programs to implement these revised performance standards, make ongoing quality improvements, and expand access to extended-duration services, without reducing families' access, we ask that you provide Head Start with robust funding in the FY 2018 appropriations bill. Additionally, given the small number of children that Early Head Start can serve, together with the dearth of high-quality services for infants and toddlers in general, we continue to support the Committee's effort to expand Early Head Start, including through child care partnerships.

Preschool Development Grants

The Preschool Development Grant (PDG) program supports states in expanding and strengthening early childhood education opportunities for children to help them succeed in school. We request that funding for FY 2018 allow for sufficient resources to enable a new competition for PDGs so that additional states can invest in early learning programs that encourage children's healthy development.

Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities

Early intervention services assist infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities. These services support children with disabilities and their families beginning in the early developmental years, potentially reducing the need for costlier supports in later years. Through the Grants for Infants and Families program (Part C of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act), states implement systems of coordinated, comprehensive, multidisciplinary, interagency programs and make early intervention services available to children with disabilities, birth through age two, and their families.

We request that you increase funding for the Grants for Infants and Families Program for FY 2018. This increase could support a number of initiatives, including incentive grants to states to support continuous

services for children with disabilities and their families until the children are eligible to enter elementary school. When implemented well, these services provide for a seamless transition from the very first stages of a child's development into early education and then elementary school.

Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities

Special Education Preschool Grants (Part B, Section 619 of IDEA) supports children with disabilities in accessing preschool opportunities and federal and state early learning programs such as Head Start and CCDBG. To receive funding through the Preschool Grants program, states must assure the U.S. Department of Education they will offer free, appropriate public education to all children with disabilities, ages three through five. Every state currently meets this standard, and in FY 2015, over 753,000 children with disabilities had access to services nationwide.

Part B is the only federal program dedicated to preschool-age children with disabilities and provides an essential service to children with disabilities across the country. We hope you will recognize the importance of this program and increase funding for Part B. This will allow for an increase in the federal share per child and assist states in ensuring that all children with disabilities ages three through five have access to preschool.

We continue to be grateful for your bipartisan work to increase federal resources for our youngest children and their families in past appropriations bills. With substantial new investments to help make child care more affordable and enhance the quality of children's early learning experiences, more parents will be able to get and keep a job, more children will get the start they need to succeed, and more teachers will have the skills and the resources they need to care for and educate our youngest children.

Sincerely,

AFSCME

American Academy of Pediatrics

CLASP

Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC)

Early Care and Education Consortium

Easterseals

Every Child Matters

Family Focused Treatment Association

First Five Years Fund

IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA) and

Jumpstart

Make It Work

National Association for the Education of Young Children

National Association of Family Child Care

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)

National Head Start Association

National Organization for Women

National Women's Law Center

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Parents as Teachers

RESULTS

Save the Children Action Network

SparkAction

Teaching Strategies
ZERO TO THREE