



CHILD CARE LAW CENTER.



LOS ANGELES AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



April 26, 2016

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education
135 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, and Education
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, and Education
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As organizations and agencies from Los Angeles County and California concerned with ensuring that all children have access to high quality early childhood education programs, we are writing to urge you to prioritize investments in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 for vital programs that are currently deeply underfunded both across the nation and here in California—the state with the most children in poverty in the nation. Adequate federal funding and support is critical for a range of early childhood programs, including the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start/Early Head Start, Preschool Development Grants, and early intervention services provided through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C (Grants for Infants and Families) and Part B (Preschool Grants). The need for additional funding and increased support is especially timely in light of recent substantive changes Congress has made to these programs, mandating new requirements that financially burden States struggling to implement the law.

While California legislators have slowly begun to rebuild the state’s early learning system over the past two budget cycles— a system that was devastated by budget cuts in California during the Great Recession— parents continue to have an enormous unmet need. A recent report by the American Institutes for Research, *Unmet Need for Preschool Services in California: Statewide and Local Analysis*, found that, “Although California’s investments in early care and education are increasing, large numbers of the state’s neediest preschool children still do not have access to early childhood education programs.” Its analysis found that at least 169,796 3- and 4-year olds eligible for preschool programs are not being served. Further, a recent report by Children Now points out that only 9 percent of eligible infants and toddlers are receiving child care services.

Specifically, in the Fiscal Year 2017 budget, as echoed by a number of national advocacy partners, we call for Congress to approve:

1. An increase of \$1.2 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)

The CCDBG is the primary federal grant program that provides child care assistance for families and funds child care quality initiatives. The FY 2016 appropriation provided a much appreciated \$326 million increase, yet much more is needed to ensure all eligible children receive high-quality services.

Congress, by an overwhelming bipartisan vote in 2014, passed the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-186) that reauthorized CCDBG for the first time in 18 years. This new law contains important and much-needed improvements to the program, including increased access to child care assistance for more families; the establishment of new health and safety requirements for child care providers; and expanded requirements to improve the quality of child care.

Yet, without additional resources, States will have to do more with less, prompting hard choices such as cutting the number of children and families receiving reliable, affordable child care assistance or reducing payment rates to already low-paid child care providers. The CCDBG reauthorization requires, for example, licensing inspectors to perform not less than annually, one unannounced inspection of all licensed CCDF providers annually to ensure compliance with all child care licensing standards. California does not now currently conduct such annual inspections, and the cost to do so would exceed \$20 million annually for approximately 45,000 licensed facilities located in California. Although the CCDBG requirement specifies license exempt providers should be included in annual inspections, this estimate does not include the estimated tens of thousands of license exempt providers statewide, which could dramatically increase the cost of such annual inspections.

In order to meet the intended goals of the CCDBG Reauthorization, it is critical that Congress adequately support States in their efforts to effectively implement the new law and fund the bipartisan CCDBG reforms. We urge Congress to increase the CCDBG appropriation by \$1.2 billion, an amount championed by multiple national advocacy groups, to help mitigate the significant increased burden placed on States through the reauthorization.

2. Funding increases to early childhood education and early literacy programs authorized in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) marks a historic recognition of the early childhood education and development as a critically important part of the K-12 continuum. The law acknowledges the urgent need for the federal government to support States to require better coordination between and alignment of, early learning programs, preschool programs, and elementary schools to better ensure all children experience smooth transitions between programs and have the strong foundation they need to succeed when they enter the K-12 system and beyond.

If adequately funded and supported, the enactment of ESSA will lead to better coordination and alignment between early learning programs and the early grades to create a continuous system that meets the needs of children through age 8. We urge Congress to provide sufficient funding for the early childhood education and early literacy programs authorized through ESSA outlined below.

a. \$350 million for Preschool Development Grants (PDG)

The FY 2016 omnibus provided \$250 million for the third year of funding PDG to support States to build or enhance a preschool program infrastructure that would enable the delivery of high-quality preschool services to children, and expand high-quality preschool programs in targeted communities. Unfortunately, due to the limited funds available, while 35 States, including California, applied for funds, only 18 States received PDG awards. California did not receive a PDG award.

California hopes to take advantage of the new version of Preschool Development Grants enacted through the ESSA which is focused on improving coordination of existing streams of preschool funding at the State level, as well as increasing access to high-quality preschool. In FY 2017, \$250 million is needed to provide the fourth and last year of funding to the current grantees. Thus, by funding PDG at \$350 million, an additional \$100 million will be available for initial State grants under the newly revised program.

b. Maintain \$190 million for Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN)

ESSA also included a new comprehensive literacy program, LEARN, that requires States to use at least 15% of their funds for literacy programs for birth through Kindergarten children. In FY 2016, Congress provided \$190 million for the predecessor literacy program, Striving Readers. We recommend maintaining that level of funding in FY 2017 for the new LEARN program.

c. Authorize \$27 million for Innovative Approaches to Literacy

ESSA also created Innovative Approaches to Literacy, which authorizes grants for early literacy services. We support the President's budget request of \$27 million for this program, and encourage you to add report language clarifying that in addition to pediatric literacy programs, other early literacy programs that met the program's requirements, such as those provided in WIC Centers, are eligible for funding.

3. Authorize an increase of \$434 million for Head Start programs

Head Start received an increase of \$570 million in FY 2016, including funding to increase the hours of Head Start programs, and an increase for Early Head Start.

However, there is still great need for additional investments in Head Start/Early Head Start. A 2013 report from the Los Angeles County Early Childhood Education Collaborative estimates that just 46 percent of eligible children were served in Head Start and less than 4 percent of eligible children were served in Early Head Start. We urge Congress to increase the Head Start appropriation by \$434 million, to ensure that additional Head Start programs are able to serve children for a full day and a full year program.

4. Increase the appropriation for the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) Preschool Grants and Grants for Infants and Families programs by \$80 million

IDEA Preschool grants is the only Federal program dedicated to preschool-aged children with disabilities. An increase of \$35 million for a total of \$403.2 million will provide a much needed increase in resources to support activities for young children with disabilities.

The IDEA Grants for Infants and Families program provided grants to States to make early intervention services available to children with disabilities, aged birth through 2, and their families. An increase of \$45 million to a FY 17 level of \$503.6 million would allow for an expansion of early intervention programs that provide services to infants and toddlers with disabilities that are designed to mitigate the need for more extensive services in the future and ensure that they receive the supports and services that they need to prepare them to enter formal education.

It is critical that the federal government provide States and early learning and child care providers with sufficient resources to both improve the quality of programs and expand slots to serve additional eligible children, particularly those from low-income families who do not have access to care due to the current insufficient federal investment. We urge Congress to ensure that these programs are adequately funded so that children are given the supports they need to succeed.

Sincerely,



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