

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 15, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and
Education Appropriations
Senate Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Acting Ranking Member
Subcommittee, on Labor, HHS, and
Education Appropriations
Senate Committee on Appropriations
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Cochran:

We write to express support for increased funding for the Head Start, Early Head Start, and Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) programs. We appreciate your continued support for these vital programs and we propose an increase of \$1 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start, and an increase of \$1 billion for CCDBG in FY2010.

Since 1965, the Head Start program has prepared more than 25 million preschool-aged children for success in school and later life by providing these children and their families with comprehensive early education, health, nutrition, and social services. In 1995, Congress established the Early Head Start program in response to scientific evidence that a child's earliest years can be the most important to healthy development. Through the Early Head Start program, HHS provides pregnant women, infants, and toddlers with child care, nutrition, health, and early education services through home visits, parent-child activities, and child development centers. Studies show that children who participate in these programs are better prepared for school than their peers and therefore have a greater chance at success later in life. Unfortunately, current Head Start and Early Head Start funding levels allow these programs to serve only half of all eligible preschoolers, and only three percent of eligible infants and toddlers. While our economy struggles, families depend on Head Start and Early Head Start for quality health, nutrition, and early education services more than ever.

As you know, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) included \$1.1 billion for Early Head Start and \$1 billion for Head Start. With this increased funding, HHS will be able to provide early education, health, nutrition, and social services to thousands of additional pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. In addition, funding provided under the ARRA will enable HHS to improve staff training, upgrade Head Start centers and classrooms, increase hours of operation, and enhance transportation services, increasing the quality and availability of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs. In order to ensure that these improvements are sustained and that eligible children receive continued services, we request increased funding for Head Start and Early Head Start in FY 2010.

Access to high-quality and affordable child care also supports children's readiness for school, as well as parents' ability to maintain stable and productive employment. However, for low-income and other families, child care is often the second highest or highest cost in the family budget. For example, the cost of child care for two children exceeds the median rent in 49 states.

Without child care assistance, many American families are left with limited income to afford rent, food, clothing, and other basic necessities.

In an effort to provide families with child care assistance and ensure high-quality care, Congress established the Child Care and Development Block Grant program in 1990. Since then, CCDBG has enabled millions of children to receive child care and has provided states with essential resources to improve the quality of that care. However, funding for CCDBG has been essentially flat since 2002. As a result, many states have tightened eligibility requirements for child care assistance, increased parents' co-payments, cut back reimbursement rates to child care providers, and scaled back initiatives to improve the quality of child care. To ensure that families retain access to child care assistance, and that states continue to improve the quality of that care, the ARRA included \$2 billion for CCDBG. This increased CCDBG funding is extremely important as the current economic situation means that a growing number of families will qualify for and need child care assistance in order to maintain stable employment. To ensure that these families continue to receive assistance after the ARRA funding expires, we request that CCDBG funding be increased for FY 2010.

We need to invest in our children to ensure that they reach their full potential. Undeniably, the Head Start, Early Head Start, and Child Care and Development Block Grant programs are a vital part of that investment, and improved funding for these programs is integral to every child having the opportunity to succeed in school and life. We thank you for your consideration of this request and support for these important programs.

Sincerely,



Christopher J. Dodd
United States Senator



Olympia J. Snowe
United States Senator



Barb Bahr

Shirley

Jay Rostyler

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Janet Lester

Ron Wyden

Robert W. Burns

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