



August 6, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chair
Senate Labor HHS Subcommittee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Labor HHS Subcommittee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

Federal investment in early care and education yields important benefits for children and families by helping children develop the skills they need for success and providing valuable support for working families. BPC Action thanks you for the bipartisan investments in early care and education programs included in the FY 2018 and FY 2019 appropriations bills. As you move forward with the FY 2020 appropriations process, we urge you to fully support increased federal investments in early care and education programs. These programs are important to our nation's current and future economic stability and help all America's children have the foundation to grow into productive, responsible adults. On behalf of the Bipartisan Policy Center's Early Childhood Initiative, this letter highlights several priorities for the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations bill.

The historic increase in funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) in FY 2018 and FY 2019 is helping American families achieve stable employment and improve child and family well-being. Child care costs continue to be a major challenge for millions of working families, and, while the additional child care funding is making a positive difference, there is still a long way to go to help America's most vulnerable children access the quality care and early learning environments that will give them a strong start in life. We recommend that the Committee increase funding for CCDBG so states can continue these critical investments and help more families have access to quality child care options. A significant increase to CCDBG provides an opportunity to not only increase the number of children and families served, but also address the quality and safety of environments where children are being cared for.

High-quality environments support a child's developmental growth, yet an Office of Inspector General report found that 96 percent of child care providers receiving CCDBG funding across 10 states had one or more potentially hazardous conditions. As more funding allows additional children to participate in CCDBG, it is critical to address the quality and supply of the facilities where they are cared for. Because states and programs are currently prohibited from using CCDBG funds for improving quality of facilities, we urge the Committee to direct a portion of any substantial CCDBG increase to prioritize the quality of CCDBG facilities and to direct

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Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to use existing funding for a national needs assessment of early care and education facilities.

Suggested Report Language: \$250,000,000 shall be available for a competitive grant program to states to support center- and family-based child care programs in acquiring, constructing, renovating, or improving their facilities to support the safe and healthy development of young children.

Suggested Report Language: The Administration for Children and Families is directed to dedicate a portion of federal CCDBG research funding for a national needs assessment of early care and learning facilities, to include center-based and family child care in rural and urban settings.

Safety in child care settings is another critical aspect of the CCDBG program that if not addressed, will make both new and existing federal funding ineffective and inefficient. Nearly five years after the CCDBG reauthorization in 2014, states are still struggling to implement background checks required under law, which is why the Bipartisan Policy Center has long called for more information and guidance for states to help them meet these requirements and protect the safety of children. We are concerned that even with additional funding, states will not be able to completely implement the law's requirements and will ultimately fail to fully protect children. We ask the Committee to encourage ACF to use a portion of any increased funding to identify, evaluate, and recommend best practices and offer technical assistance to assist other federal and state agencies in fully implementing the requirements section 658H(b) of the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990 for child care staff members.

We also encourage continued strong investment in Head Start and Early Head Start, with a focus on the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (EHS-CCP). The EHS-CCP programs are producing positive impacts across the country, combining the best of local flexibility with federal accountability. These innovative partnerships [are demonstrating](#) quality improvements, no-cost ripple effects, and numerous benefits for children and child care providers, beyond what can be provided by expanding Early Head Start on its own. Therefore, we urge you expand the partnerships to meet more child care needs around the country by including at least \$50,000,000 and up to \$525,000,000 (the House-passed appropriated funding level) for Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships.

Suggested Report Language: The Administration for Children and Families is directed to prioritize Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships when allocating funding and to annually report to Congress on the details of the grant awards.



Ensuring that all children have the opportunity to achieve their full potential is not a liberal or conservative priority, but an American priority, and we applaud the commitment you and your colleagues have shown to increasing access to quality child care. We look forward to working with you on these important topics.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Stockwell".

Michele Stockwell
Executive Director, BPC Action