

May 13, 2014

Dear Senator,

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children (FFCC), a bipartisan organization advocating for legislative change in Congress to make children and their families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions, I urge you to pass the Strong Start for America's Children Act (S.1697) out of committee tomorrow with no significant changes. This important legislation will increase children's access to high-quality early childhood education, ensuring children enter kindergarten ready to learn and ultimately compete in a global economy.

High-quality early education helps ensure healthy development for young children, which contributes to long-term success throughout school and into adulthood. Research reveals that preschool improves early reading and math skills, reduces grade retention, leads to higher high school graduation rates, increased earnings as adults, better long-term health results, less criminal behavior, and fewer teen pregnancies. As a result, for every \$1 spent on high-quality early education the government receives about \$7 of increased tax revenue and cost savings.

Despite the positive outcomes, high-quality preschool is not available to every child. The high cost of private preschool and limited availability of public programs means that children from low and middle-income families are often left out, creating an opportunity gap before children even enter kindergarten. By unfairly putting children at inequitable starting points, K-12 teachers are forced to focus on helping students catch up rather than fostering a unified pursuit of academic excellence and some children are never given a fair chance to succeed.

The Strong Start for America's Children Act would make great strides toward ensuring that every child has access to high-quality pre-K regardless of income, and we urge you to ensure that the core provisions of the legislation remain unchanged. Namely, the quality provisions should be protected, including requiring teachers to have BAs and specialized training in child development; curricula that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate; small class sizes and settings that support and encourage learning; and wraparound services to ensure that children receive all the support they need for healthy development.

Additionally, like the successful Children's Health Insurance Program, the bill establishes an effective structure for the federal-state partnership with shared federal and state financing to promote affordability, quality, and long-term viability. Because this structure gives states significant flexibility we urge you to not support efforts to turn this legislation into a block grant that could create unequal quality standards across states. Finally, the bill strengthens the connection between childcare, pre-K, and kindergarten to help these systems work together to better serve children, and we hope you will support this coordination throughout the committee markup.

Thank you for considering this the Strong Start for America's Children Act, if you have any questions please contact Kevin Lindsey, Senior Director, Education Policy, at KevinL@firstfocus.net.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President