

Message from ELC



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Fund child care -- it helps all of us

Congress can lend a steadying hand to families this fall and help children become more self-sufficient by approving a funding increase of \$800 million for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). Child care is a major industry in itself -- it creates jobs, generates tax dollars and pumps money into local economies.

More than two million children nationally benefit from this child-care assistance. CCDBG aid helps parents afford the child care they need in order to go to work, while increasing children's access to safe, supportive child care, which is critical to their long-term education and success.

These federal funds, first enacted in 1990, are administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, in allotments to states. States use a formula to subsidize child-care expenses of low-income families with children under age 13. In Florida, these funds are administered by the Early Learning Coalitions.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds buoyed the CCDGB over the past two years (benefiting 20,000 Florida children). But now they are drained. Congress cannot allow funding levels to fall back to the fiscal years 2002-08 (even prior to the recession) -- when flat funding led states to enact restrictive eligibility criteria. This resulted in long waiting lists and/or inadequate provider payment rates for child-care assistance programs.

By the end of that disastrous period, only one in seven eligible children received federal child-care assistance, and the unmet need has only grown since then as the eligible population has increased and number of children receiving assistance has decreased.

Increases in the cost for full-time child care in recent years have outpaced inflation. Parents and caregivers struggle to pay thousands of dollars a year. About 1,600 licensed child-care centers in Miami-Dade County receive subsidies. The funds help significantly lower the cost that parents pay. During the past year, an average of 16,000 to 20,000 Miami-Dade children waited on monthly rolls for the financial support they needed to attend a child-care program.

CCDBG plays a critical role in helping children learn and their families work, helping bolster our economic recovery. A House subcommittee this month passed a bill with \$700 million of additional funding. Now it's up to the full Congress to approve the additional CCDBG funding, which supports millions of working families and gives a boost to their children's school

readiness. Congress should extend this help, which helps us all.

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