



First Five Years Fund

December 13, 2017

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
United States House of Representatives

Dear Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott:

The First Five Years Fund (FFYF) is writing to offer recommendations for the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act as the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) moves forward. FFYF is committed to increasing access to affordable, high-quality early learning and care opportunities for children from birth through age five, and we value the long track record of bipartisan leadership by our Congressional champions. Birth through age five is an essential period for a child's brain and physical development. Supporting the early childhood educators who teach our youngest learners supports both positive child outcomes, and the workforce at large, thus strengthening the American economy. Access to quality early childhood education (ECE) means that parents who are also students can work towards and attain college degrees that prepare them for successful careers. Additionally, the quality of the education a young child receives is heavily shaped by the individuals who make up the ECE workforce. The reauthorization of the HEA provides a timely opportunity to support for higher education to align with other relevant legislation – just as the last reauthorization of the Higher Education Act aligned with reauthorization of the Head Start Act in 2008 and 2007 -- like the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which meaningfully integrated ECE throughout the law in order to support the critically important work being done in states and districts across the country. Various long term positive outcomes prove that quality ECE lifts families out of poverty. It is vital that the next iteration of the HEA ensures a pipeline of high-quality early childhood educators and aligns with the innovative early learning initiatives being led by states and communities in order to meaningfully impact our youngest learners.

We are particularly thankful to the Committee for preserving the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) Program. Enabling low-income college students to access quality child care provides a greater opportunity for nontraditional college students to pursue and complete a higher education degree. The return on investment cannot be overlooked as these

students are then better positioned to attain financial security through sustained participation in the workforce.

FFYF shared HEA recommendations earlier in November, and have made the following suggestions for the Committee to consider as the legislation moves through the process.

1. Ensuring a Pipeline of High-Quality Early Childhood Educators

A. FFYF Title II Recommendations Overview:

The new grant program outlined in Title II strengthens the connection of apprenticeships and higher education. In order for this opportunity to be a viable path for training the ECE workforce we recommend adding a focus on ‘high-wage’ jobs to include other high demand career paths that positively contribute to the strength of the economy. Research shows that access to quality early learning and care saves taxpayer dollars, makes working families more economically secure; and prepares children to succeed in school, earn higher wages, and live healthier lives. Teacher aptitude and training are major determining factors in the overall quality of a child’s early learning experience. Accounting for this high-value, highly-skill dependent line of work in the reauthorization would yield multiple benefits including greater access to quality ECE, supporting working families, and strengthening the economy.

Suggested Changes to Title II, Sec. 202 Grants for Access to High-Demand Careers

The purpose of this section is to expand student access to, and participation in, new industry-led earn-and-learn programs leading to high-skill, high-demand careers that strengthen the economy.

B. FFYF Title IV Recommendations Overview:

In recognition of nationwide teacher shortages, which include early childhood educators, we recommend the reinstatement of the Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant Program. Recipients of this grant agree to teach for a minimum four years at an elementary school, secondary school, or educational service agency that serves students from low-income families. The rate of teacher retention, particularly for early childhood educators teaching in low-income communities, is less than four years. The TEACH Grant Program has been proven to bolster the continuation of a high-quality teacher pipeline and address teacher shortages across states and communities.

Suggested Changes to Title IV, Sec. 407 Sunset of TEACH Grants

Reinstate TEACH Grants or establish incentives for teacher retention elsewhere that explicitly include early childhood educators.

The First Five Years Fund appreciates the significant undertaking of the Committee to reauthorize HEA. Thank you for considering our recommendations for updating the PROSPER Act in order to support state and community efforts to expand high-quality early learning opportunities. Updating the law to align with and support local leadership, along with ESSA's important early learning provisions, will strengthen the pipeline of high-quality early childhood educators and ultimately help numerous children and families across the country. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues as the reauthorization process continues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kris Perry". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kris Perry
Executive Director
First Five Years Fund