June 6, 2013

RE: Invest in child care and early learning—urge approval of $257 million in additional child care and preschool funding

To: The Honorable John A. Pérez, Speaker of the California State Assembly
The Honorable Darrell Steinberg, President pro Temp of the California State Senate
Joint Budget Conference Committee Members

We are advocates who represent and include front-line caregivers, women’s equality, immigrant and civil rights leaders, child development and health experts, educators, promotores, union members, clergy, small businesses, activist moms, and outspoken parents from Palo Alto’s suburbs to South LA’s neighborhood justice networks. We are united in a shared agenda to protect and prioritize California’s children. Having felt the devastating consequences of the $1 billion diverted from kids in our communities, we are fighting to protect vital child care and early learning programs from further cuts, and for wise surplus investments in our littlest citizens’ future. **We urge swift approval of the Assembly’s investment of $257 million in additional child care and preschool funding for 2013-14.**

California has the highest number of working low-income families in the United States, with nearly half that lack high school diploma. In these households are more than 3.2 million children, or 40 percent of those under the age of 18. Despite California needing 2.3 million college graduates to meet demand by 2025, early education and care have been drastically cut. Neither K-12 systems nor community colleges have strategic plans to widen access to the state’s working poor. Equally disturbing and causally connected to the above outcomes is Sacramento’s failure to equally value care work and care workers.

We must begin the path toward prosperity for everyone by adequately investing in quality early education and simultaneously supporting higher standards for early childhood educators and providers. There is a desperate need to break the cycle of inadequate funding for child development that causes outcomes that superficially justify exorbitant prison and other costs. James Heckman, the Nobel-Prize winning economist, has noted such “first five” investment yields the highest possible economic return; research indicates child care and early learning can pay dividends of up to $17 per dollar spent, a figure that reduces that price tag for state prisons.

The irrationality of this cycle is clear. We have long pressed for elected officials to find the courage to break the cycle of spiraling debt on the backs of the state’s poorest children. So we were heartened to learn that the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance voted to devote $257 million to child care and preschool to give tens of thousands of children the head start they need to succeed as K-12 students. Specifically, these proposed funds will enable some 48,000 boys and girls the opportunity...
to enroll in preschool or equivalent in-home early learning settings alongside their more economically advantaged peers. We also strongly support the Subcommittee’s vote to move child care funding under Proposition 98, a critical step in securing a strong future for all of California’s children.

We also recognize that access to child care alone will not be enough for some families who in the wake of the Great Recession are still unemployed, underemployed, or face significant barriers to self-sufficiency. The Assembly’s 'Mitchell Plan' acknowledges this reality, securing reinvestments in CalWORKs grants, supportive services, and subsidized jobs. We support these efforts to reduce poverty among California's children and enable them to be prepared for success in life.

We applaud the Subcommittee and urge their full Assembly colleagues, members of the Senate, and the Governor to support this proposal as part of a larger commitment to closing the ever-widening economic and achievement gaps that disproportionately affect children of single mothers and families of color.

The returns on the state’s commitment to its children will be significant: first, children will be more likely to excel in math and reading, and attend college. Increased investment in early learning and child care also will give a much needed boost to working parents, especially women who earn lower incomes, allowing them to obtain the peace of mind that comes with high quality care—and thus the ability to remain in their jobs, pursue training and higher education programs and advance into the middle-class.

California’s small businesses will especially benefit when employees have both affordable and reliable child care options, which include expanding consumer choice to parents who favor licensed day care and family preschool settings. Some 5,000 providers who run licensed home-based centers have shuttered their doors due to recent cuts, shedding jobs in a women-dominated workforce and reducing the number of highly qualified early educators statewide.

We know what the consequences are if we do not improve child care in our state. Last month a mother employed by a janitorial service company couldn’t risk the employment consequences of missing her shift. So she left her 4-year-old unattended in her car outside in the parking lot, with the intention of checking back every opportunity she could. “Arden Fair incident spurs reminder on availability of emergency child care” was the Sacramento Bee headline, illustrating the deep struggles so many Californians face negotiating the competing demands of work and family.

Our child care system should recognize that every child in California should have the opportunity to reach her or his full potential, and no parent should have to worry about the care their child is receiving while they are at work. We are counting on you, our leaders in Sacramento, to lead the way there.

We urge you to approve this funding in full in the current budget proposal, and to support legislation such as the Quality Family Child Care Act (AB641) which puts investment in early learning and care for our children on the top of our agenda, and at the center of any debate on how best to improve our state’s education system.

We look forward to working with you under the banner of Raising California Together.

Sincerely,
AFSCME California
American Association of University Women - California
California Immigrant Policy Center
California Labor Federation (Art Pulaski, Executive Secretary-Treasurer)
California Latinas for Reproductive Justice
California NOW (Patricia Bellasalma, President)
California Reinvestment Coalition
CARECEN (Martha Arevalo, Executive Director)
Child Care Providers UNITED (Tonia McMillian, Bellflower; Teresa Fuentes, San Ysidro; Rita Guess, San Jose)
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles-CHIRLA (Angelica Salas, Executive Director)
The Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking
Community Coalition (Marqueece Harris-Dawson, President & CEO)
DREAM Team Los Angeles
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
First 5 Alameda
First 5 Association
Grandparents as Parents Support Group: Berkeley (Dr. Lenora Poe, Founder, Director and Facilitator)
Greenlining Institute
Inner City Struggle (Maria Brenes, Executive Director)
Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights-CLUE
Kern County African American Child Care Association (Debra Corley, Vice President)
Labor Project for Working Families
Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy-LAANE (Roxana Tynan, Executive Director)
Los Angeles County Federation of Labor (Maria Elena Durazo, Executive Secretary-Treasurer)
MomsRising
Museum of Children's Arts (MOCHA), Quincy McCoy, Executive Director
National Organization of Legal Services Workers/UAW Local 2320
OURWalmart (Jovani Gomez, Paramount; Victoria Martinez, Alhambra; Richard Reynoso, Baldwin Park
Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)
Sacramento Rainbow Chamber of Commerce (Dr. Darrick Lawson, President)
Safe Passages
Schoenbeck and Associates, Los Altos, CA (Mary Lynne Schoenbeck, Founder, Silicon Valley Career Counseling/Life Planning)
SEIU California State Council (Laphonza Butler, President)
SEIU Local 99 (Courttni Pugh, Executive Director)
SEIU Local 521 (Luisa Blue, RN, Chief Elected Officer)
South of Market Child Care, Inc. (Noushin Mofakham, Executive Director)
St. John's Well Family & Child Clinic (Jim Mangia, President & CEO)
UAW Local 4123, 6,000+ Teaching Associates, Graduate Assistants, across Cal State campuses

UAW 5810, 6,000+ Postdoctoral Scientists across University of California campuses

United Educators of San Francisco

United Way of Greater Los Angeles (Alicia Lara, V.P. Community Investment Department)

Western Center for Law and Poverty

Micah Ali, School Board President, Compton Unified Governing Board of Trustees

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Alison Wishard Guerra, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, UC San Diego, Education Studies, Early Childhood Education

Kim Kruckel, Executive Director, Child Care Law Center

Rev. Dr. Lewis E. Logan, II, Co-Founder and Senior Pastor, RUACH Christian Community Fellowship & Co-Convener of the CLUE-LA Black Brown Clergy Coalition

Miguel Santiago, Los Angeles Community College Board of Trustees Member

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Steve Zimmer, Board Member, Los Angeles Unified School District

CC: Honorable Edmund G. Brown
Members, California State Assembly Democratic Caucus
Members, California State Senate Democratic Caucus