

Pre-k and Child Care Investments Praised

Long term, sustainable funding necessary to solve child care staffing crisis

(August 2022) Members of the Pennsylvania Provider Advisory Board issued the following statement regarding the final 2022-23 Pennsylvania state budget. The Pennsylvania Provider Advisory Board is made up of 40 early childhood professionals from across the state working to identify the needs of the early childhood workforce and using the experiences shared from those in the field to inform the advocacy efforts of the Start Strong PA and Pre-K for PA campaigns.

“The Pennsylvania Provider Advisory Board applauds the Pennsylvania General Assembly and Governor Wolf for increasing state funding for both the PA Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs (HSSAP). The 2022-23 state budget includes \$60 million in new state funding for PA Pre-K Counts and \$19 million for PA’s Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs.

“Quality early childhood education is fundamental and essential for Pennsylvania’s children and their families and PA Pre-K Counts and HSSAP are offered at high quality early childhood programs. High quality makes a difference, with the quality of classroom teachers is a primary component of the quality of any program. Degreed pre-K teachers are in high demand and with those teachers being paid approximately 22% less than their Kindergarten counterparts in school districts, the rate included in these new funds can help with recruitment and retention.

“The \$79 million expansion will not only help pre-k providers recruit and retain staff and deal with the rising facility and supply costs but will increase access for more families, offering opportunities to over 2,300 additional three -and four-year-old children. Unfortunately, the valuable services offered by Pre-K Counts and HSSAP are not available to all Pennsylvania families. And even though Pre-K Counts is offered through a variety of provider types, including child care providers, not all child care programs receive these funds. It is important that expansion continue so that more families have access, and that access can be provided in additional child care programs.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated how important it is for families to be able to access and afford child care. The Pennsylvania Provider Advisory Board appreciates the General Assembly’s effort to help families continue to access child care subsidy through an additional \$25 million in child care assistance funds. Families utilizing child care subsidies will appreciate the income eligibility expansion. Child care is so expensive, however, that the many families who do not qualify for child care subsidies will still not be able to afford high quality care.

“Though affordability is critical for families, it is irrelevant if child care programs do not have spots available for their children. Tens of thousands of families are currently looking for, and cannot find, child care. Unfortunately, while this budget gives \$90 million in American Rescue Plan Act federal funds for a one-time staff bonus, it does not address the industry’s historical low wage issue which is causing this devastating child care crisis. Across Pennsylvania there are more than

32,400 children sitting on waiting lists in child care programs as a result of 7,000 vacant child care staffing positions.

“The \$90 million in one-time discretionary American Rescue Plan Act federal funding will provide a short-term solution for child care providers workforce recruitment and retention crisis but will not help raise child care wages on an on-going basis. These low wages, less than \$11.00 an hour, make it impossible for the child care industry to compete with other industries offering higher wages for less specialized skills. If Pennsylvania’s elected leadership continues to ignore the need for long-term funding to ensure systematic changes, the child care staffing crisis will continue, impacting our children, their families, and our economic recovery.