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**START STRONG PA ENCOURAGED BY FOCUS ON INFANTS AND TODDLERS,
CALLS FOR INCREASED STATE INVESTMENTS**

2019-20 state budget includes an important down payment for high-quality child care

HARRISBURG, Pennsylvania – [Start Strong PA](#) observed the 2019-20 PA budget as an important down payment to ensure all infants and toddlers learn, grow, and succeed. The following statement was issued by the ten principal partners leading Start Strong PA, a campaign to ensure that children across the state can access affordable, high-quality child care programs during the most critical period of brain development, the first three years of life:

“We are pleased Governor Wolf’s budget provides a plan for spending \$101 million in federal child care dollars that will help Pennsylvania families who need high-quality child care for their children to thrive. Given the essential role that high-quality child care has to support Pennsylvania’s working families, we urge Pennsylvania policymakers to explore all options to allocate additional state resources to address the critical needs of our state’s early childhood system that limit access and affordability.

Two elements of Governor Wolf’s budget proposal closely align with the campaign’s goals, including: a \$15 million allocation to remove approximately 970 infants and toddlers from the subsidy waitlist and move them into programs that will elevate their potential; and a roughly \$10 million allocation that will help to reinforce program stability and consistent staff-child relationships by increasing quality add-on rates for infants and toddlers by 28% for STAR 2, 3, and 4 programs.

In addition, the Governor’s proposal includes a \$2 million allocation to support early childhood career pathways which acknowledges that children develop best when they have consistent teachers and relationships. The campaign believes this proposal will begin to address the significant need to attract and retain additional talented adults to become early childhood educators. Furthermore, an allocation of approximately \$74 million would increase rates to support the move to a \$12 per hour minimum wage in Pennsylvania.

The Governor’s proposals use federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars. Start Strong PA campaign partners believe that these increased investments demonstrate the bipartisan support for ensuring our youngest children have what they need to thrive, while supporting the needs of our state’s workforce and education systems.”

The Governor acknowledged the dual role of high-quality child care for children and families by saying, “We can get more kids off of waiting lists...and help more parents make their way into the workforce. Pennsylvania’s children deserve every chance to succeed.”

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The importance of quality child care to the Commonwealth's workforce was also raised by Senator Joe Scarnati in his reaction to the Governor's address saying, "we have to focus on the families and we have to focus on their problems that stop them from getting to work."

Start Strong PA is urging the Pennsylvania General Assembly to build on the proposed federal allocations, and invest additional state dollars to support the positive brain development of all infants and toddlers by addressing access and affordability issues.

Specifically, Start Strong PA supports:

1. Increased reimbursement rates for the highest quality STAR 3 and 4 programs serving infants and toddlers to the full cost of quality;
2. Increased investments to support more STAR 2 providers to move to STAR 3 and 4 thereby increasing high-quality capacity;
3. Increased investments in the child care workforce by adding slots for Rising STARS Tuition Assistance and T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarships, fully funding Education and Retention Awards, and conducting a child care labor market survey.

"Our state is at a critical moment for determining the future of infants and toddlers in Pennsylvania. Legislators must build on last year's momentum that acknowledges the role of state funds in our early childhood system. We call on legislators to use this year's state budget to foster a better future for all children by providing them a solid educational foundation through access to high-quality child care that their families can afford."

The 2019-20 proposed budget includes the following expanded investments to early learning:

- Allocation of \$101 million in federal child care funds;
- Increase in Pre-K Counts investment: \$40 million;
- Increase in Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program investment: \$10 million;
- Increase in state funds for evidence-based home visiting: \$5 million.

Start Strong PA is an initiative of Early Learning PA (ELPA), a statewide coalition of advocates focused on supporting young Pennsylvanians birth to age five (5). ELPA also advocates for expanding publicly funded Home Visiting services [via the Childhood Begins at Home Campaign](#), and access to high-quality, publicly funded pre-k for income eligible children [via the Pre-K for PA Campaign](#).

Start Strong PA is an initiative of Early Learning PA. Through a statewide collaboration of partners, Start Strong PA aims to support healthy child development, working families, and the economy by increasing access to and affordability of high-quality child care programs for young children. Learn more at www.startstrongpa.org.

Start Strong PA | Partner Organizations

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids | First Up | Mission: Readiness | Pennsylvania Association for The Education of Young Children | Pennsylvania Child Care Association | Pennsylvania Head Start Association | Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children | Public Citizens for Children and Youth | The United Way of Pennsylvania | Trying Together