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**EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVOCATES, PROFESSIONALS, AND FAMILIES  
MAKE CASE FOR INCREASED INVESTMENTS IN HIGH-QUALITY INFANT/TODDLER CHILD CARE**

*Start Strong PA Campaign Launch At State Capitol Featured House and Senate Leaders  
In Support of Healthy Development for Infants and Toddlers*

**HARRISBURG, Pennsylvania** - Increased investments for high-quality infant/toddler child care in Pennsylvania are closer to reality after the launch of Start Strong PA, a new statewide advocacy campaign from the partner organizations of Early Learning PA (ELPA).

Today, Tuesday, January 29, 2019, Start Strong PA hosted its launch event at the Pennsylvania State Capitol Complex in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania where approximately 75 early childhood advocates including state legislators, professionals, and families with children in child care were in attendance.

The launch event started with a complimentary high-quality coffee bar in the morning where legislators and their staff were invited to 'start strong' their morning with a cup of coffee made possible by Little Amps Coffee Roasters, and share pictures of the infants and toddlers in their life. In the afternoon, a press conference was held and included representatives from partner organizations, state legislators, administration, parents, and high-quality child care programs.

Parent Lauren Bethea spoke about her experiences waiting for care for her daughter Lorraine, "The weight of the world was on my shoulders until my child got in to a high-quality program. Every young child like Lorraine deserves this opportunity. Waiting for space in a program until your child is 2, 3, or even older before enrollment is not an option for so many families." Lorraine has attended a high-quality program in Pittsburgh for nearly two years. "She deserves to have the best start possible!"

Speaking to the challenges of running a high-quality center that cares for infants and toddlers, Joselynn Jones, Program Coordinator at Kencrest West in Philadelphia declared, "It is hard to keep professionals who want to work in this field for the money!" and explained her challenge to maintain the consistent staff that children and families need to thrive. Additional speakers noted that poor reimbursement rates from the state contribute to an inability to operate high-quality programs.

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## P. 2 - CASE FOR INCREASED INVESTMENTS IN HIGH-QUALITY INFANT/TODDLER CHILD CARE

Senator Pat Browne, Co-Chair, Early Childhood Education Caucus, spoke to the importance of children getting the right start rather than putting more money into other appropriations like corrections. "This is the type of results-based thinking that's necessary to maximize where the state spends its limited amount of discretionary revenue. These early learning programs have a proven track record of helping prevent at-risk young people from falling behind or dropping out of school. Looking long-term, young people who receive early learning assistance are more likely to become productive members of our community. By prioritizing spending on these vital programs it will save the Commonwealth long-term costs.

Representative Longiotti, Co-Chair, Early Childhood Education Caucus further spoke to the educational foundation that infants and toddlers receive in high-quality child care, "programs provide a safe and secure environment and teachers help children learn the "executive function" and self-regulation skills that are necessary for life success – from being able to pay attention, plan, and prioritize to recognizing, naming and controlling their emotions."

Also speaking was Senator Jay Costa who noted the shortage of highly qualified early childhood professionals due to the poor compensation in the field. "Paying [early childhood professionals] some of the lowest wages in the service industry is simply unacceptable and needs to change." Representative Lynda Schlegel Culver further made the case for investments noting that recent data show "the state has a waiting list of over 4,300 kids for a subsidy and an average waiting time of 88 days as of November. And only one-third of children receiving subsidized care were in Keystone STAR 3 or 4 programs."

Deputy Secretary Suzann Morris was also present and spoke to her role as a mom and to her leadership role over current initiatives of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning. She shared work underway to make early childhood programs more efficient such as program coordination in regional Early Learning Resource Centers.

Jodi Askins, Executive Director, PennAEYC, speaking on behalf of the campaign shared "Infant-toddler brains make over a million neural connections every second - forming brain architecture for life. At no other time in a human's life will the brain develop at this remarkable speed or with such intricacy. This is the foundation upon which all later learning, behavior, and health depend. That's why we need Pennsylvanians to join us and help our infants and toddlers "start strong"!"

Guided by this evidenced-based research, Start Strong PA (a statewide initiative) was launched to help ensure every Pennsylvania infant and toddler starts off strong. Advocates can connect with the Campaign on Facebook and Twitter @StartStrongPA. Questions about the Campaign may be directed to [info@startstrongpa.org](mailto:info@startstrongpa.org). For more information visit: [www.startstrongpa.org](http://www.startstrongpa.org).

Start Strong PA is an initiative of Early Learning PA. Additional early learning opportunities of focus for ELPA include: [Childhood Begins At Home](#) (home-visiting); [Pre-K for PA](#) (pre-kindergarten); and early intervention. To learn more visit: [www.earlylearningpa.org](http://www.earlylearningpa.org).

**NOTE TO WORKING PRESS:** For questions or to schedule an interview with Campaign launch speakers or Start Strong PA partner organizations, please contact Lissa Geiger Shulman at 717.802.1881 or [lissa@tryingtogether.org](mailto:lissa@tryingtogether.org).

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### **P. 3 - CASE FOR INCREASED INVESTMENTS IN HIGH-QUALITY INFANT/TODDLER CHILD CARE**

**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](http://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 | Trying Together | United Way of Pennsylvania

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