



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

June 12, 2019

The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Deb Haaland
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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Matthew E. Melmed

Dear Senator Warren and Representative Haaland:

I write to applaud your efforts through the *Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act* to address the need for high-quality, affordable child care, one of the biggest challenges to working families with very young children, and consequently to the wellbeing of our nation's future workforce. The bill recognizes that all families, regardless of income, need support to access and afford high-quality child care and would help ensure that no family pays more than they can afford.

With more than three in five mothers in the labor force, solving this challenge is a major priority for families with infants and toddlers. Quality child care feeds a baby's growing brain, supporting healthy emotional and cognitive development and helping babies grow into strong learners and successful adults. But despite the crucial role that high-quality care plays in preparing children for school and life, it is incredibly hard to find and afford for most families with babies and toddlers.

The bill also recognizes the critical role of the child care workforce, who are the essential ingredient in child care quality, but receive very low levels of compensation. Average child care wages are at the bottom of the occupational ladder at just over \$10 an hour, despite extensive research showing that better paid staff are associated with better quality care. Infant-toddler teachers facilitate both the child-adult interaction and the exploration that is the essence of baby learning, highly skilled work that looks very different from caring for older children. The *Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act* acknowledges the importance of a highly trained, qualified and diverse workforce by proposing training and educational supports, as well as assuring appropriate compensation.

We have a long way to go in the United States before the families that are the core economic unit of our society, both now and in the future, receive the work supports corresponding to this crucial role. Currently, only 4.2 percent of infants and toddlers from families with low- and moderate-incomes receive any direct assistance for child care from federal programs in partnership with states. Moving the needle on that dial requires a bold vision to address the complexities of a system of high-quality care. We appreciate the contribution of this comprehensive legislation in underscoring the necessity of addressing this national need and adding to the discourse on forging a solution for all families.

We look forward to working with both of you, as well as Congress as a whole, to secure substantial investments in child care and early learning programs, as well as to craft a long-term solution that addresses what young children, their families, and their child care teachers need to thrive.

Sincerely,

Matthew E. Melmed
Executive Director