



May 16, 2007

The Hon. Robert Casey
United States Senate
383 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Casey:

Thank you for your leadership in introducing S. 1374, the "Prepare All Kids Act of 2007." With a record-breaking number of states making significant progress in voluntary, quality pre-k over the last two years, it makes sense for national policy to bolster that investment in our children.

As your legislation notes, quality pre-k provides a substantial return on every dollar invested. We are delighted that the *Prepare All Kids Act* would provide a new \$5 billion federal investment in grants to high-quality pre-k programs. Pre-K Now advocates voluntary, quality pre-k for all three and four year olds. Your proposal to target new federal support to children in households earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold will move our nation closer to the vision of pre-k for all.

Thank you for including children from three through five, providing a set-aside for infants and toddlers, specifying that programs be "full day" or six hours in duration, and supporting expansions of both the school day and the school year. We applaud your bill's emphasis on the following elements of quality:

Well-educated teachers: The most effective pre-k teachers have earned bachelor's degrees and have additional, specialized training in early-childhood education. S. 1374 requires teachers to have, or work toward, a BA degree, and permits funds to be used for professional development.

Low teacher-child ratios and small class sizes: Young children learn best in small groups and we strongly support the 20-student class size and 10-1 student-teacher/aide ratios in the bill. We recommend an 18-student class size for programs serving three-year-olds.

Research-based curriculum: High-quality pre-k programs are consistently built around curricula with specific goals that integrate learning across all aspects of a child's development. We applaud the bill's emphasis on a research and evidence-based, as well as developmentally appropriate, curriculum.

Family involvement: Because parents and extended family members are an integral part of high-quality pre-k, we support the requirement that providers outline their plans for involving families in the pre-k program.

Special-needs children: We appreciate the bill's provision to permit funds to serve children with disabilities, English language learners, children in foster care or without permanent homes, and other children with special needs. The provision that funds can be used for transportation also acknowledges a significant barrier some children experience in hard-to-serve communities and neighborhoods.

Diverse delivery: Pre-K Now supports the diverse delivery system already in place in our states and communities. We appreciate that S. 1374 recognizes this fact by specifying that 25 percent of the providers receiving funds be community-based programs.

While the legislation requires a pre-k program to outline how parents and families “will receive assistance through supportive services provided within the community” it does not specify that funds can be used to expand the range of comprehensive services. We recommend that the legislation include that use of funds, since such services, including health screenings, are an important element of quality pre-k. We also urge that federal funds be permitted to cover the costs of state pre-k for children in military families, a particular issue for the large number of military families stationed in Pennsylvania.

Finally, we are very pleased that S. 1374 requires collaboration, monitoring, the maintenance of current state and local efforts, and that states “supplement and not supplant” current funding. While states have made great strides in building quality, voluntary pre-k programs, there is still some distance to go, and we will continue to urge greater state and federal investments.

We applaud your leadership in introducing the *Prepare All Kids Act of 2007*, as well as your action earlier this year to earmark \$5 billion in the Senate budget resolution. We look forward to working with you and with the Committee and Subcommittee leadership – Senators Kennedy, Enzi, Dodd and Alexander – so that legislation to build federal support for quality, voluntary pre-k moves to successful action by the Congress.

Thank you again for your strong leadership on behalf of America’s children.

Sincerely yours,



Libby Doggett, Ph.D.
Executive Director



Kathy Patterson
Federal Policy Director

cc: Members, United States Senate