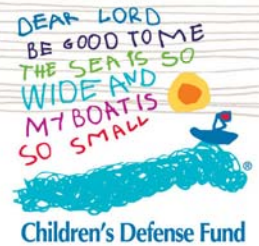


July 24, 2009



The Honorable George Miller, Chair
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Miller:

The Children's Defense Fund is pleased to support the Early Learning Challenge Fund (Title IV) that you have proposed as part of the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2009. The need to support states in their efforts to construct high quality learning systems for children birth to age five is long past due and desperately needed if we seriously hope to improve the life paths of millions of children.

Millions of children under age six regularly spend time in child care arrangements and children with working mothers spend an average of 36 hours per week in such settings. Children in families who live in poverty are the most in need of high quality, comprehensive early childhood development programs and the least likely to have access to them. The challenge grants would provide opportunities for states to develop comprehensive systems that include all types of early care and education services and supports, with a focus on the needs of children in low income families.

The bill includes critical components that are essential for the development of healthy and successful children: early learning reform; evidenced-based quality standards; enhanced program review and monitoring; comprehensive professional development; and coordinated systems for health, mental health and developmental screenings. In addition, we applaud the inclusion of improving support for parents, developing a process to assess children's school readiness, and using data to improve child outcomes. These components will strengthen both the role parents play in their children's early education and the constructive use of data for student improvement.

We stand committed to high quality early childhood programs as a key element in the prevention of children entering the cradle to prison pipeline. This legislation, when enacted, will be a defining moment in the country's acknowledgement that young children deserve high quality systems for early learning.

Thank you for your commitment to and leadership for the children in the neighborhoods of Harlem, the rural roads of Mississippi, the Native American reservations of New Mexico, the children of Katrina and the barrios of California. We look forward to working with you to enact this significant legislation.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marian Wright Edelman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marian Wright Edelman