



START
STRONG
PA



The Honorable Jake Corman
President Pro Tempore
Senate of Pennsylvania
350 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Kim Ward
Majority Leader
Senate of Pennsylvania
292 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Patrick J. Browne
Appropriations Chairman
Senate of Pennsylvania
281 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Jay Costa
Democratic Leader
Senate of Pennsylvania
535 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Vincent Hughes
Appropriations Chairman
Senate of Pennsylvania
545 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Bryan Cutler
Speaker of the House
PA House of Representatives
139 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Kerry Benninghoff
Majority Leader
PA House of Representatives
110 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Stan Saylor
Appropriations Chairman
PA House of Representatives
245 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Joanna McClinton
Democratic Leader
PA House of Representatives
423 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Matthew Bradford
Appropriations Chairman
PA House of Representatives
512E Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

March 23, 2021

Dear Legislative Leaders:

As stakeholder partners in the Early Learning PA coalition, a collaborative effort comprised of three distinct campaigns focused on home visiting, child care and pre-k advocating for increased access to voluntary, high-quality early care and education opportunities for children across the state, we write to you with concern over the serious negative implications of HB 71 (Warner), which we understand may see further activity on the floor of the House of Representatives this week.

The bill, which would amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to limit the growth in spending annually for the state budget by tying it to both the average of the change in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for all urban consumers over the immediately preceding three calendar years and the average percentage change in the state's population during the immediately preceding three calendar years, therefore arbitrarily pre-determines spending levels that do not match the needs of our state's youngest residents or their families. Support for this legislation equates to limiting access to critical programs including evidence-based home visiting, Child Care Works, Pre-K Counts, and Head Start Supplemental Assistance. During the pandemic, families have relied on these services as a lifeline, and they will be essential as the state's economy looks to rebound and parents return to work after the COVID-19 crisis.

Below is a sampling of the impact instituting the needlessly harsh, illogically low spending ceiling set by HB 71 will have on Pennsylvania's young children and families:

- *Home Visiting:* Since the 2017-18 budget, home visiting has grown in the Community-Based Family Center line (Department of Human Services budget) from just \$3.2 million to approximately \$19.5 million today – on average well over the CPI-U annual adjustment. Despite this \$16.3 million investment over a series of budget cycles, statewide unmet need for low-income pregnant women, children and families is still 95 percent – meaning that only about 17,000 children and families are being served out of 338,000 eligible. This will also impact any growth in the separate Nurse-Family Partnership line within the Department of Human Services budget that has largely remained stagnant in recent years and will prevent them from serving additional low-income, first-time pregnant women identified for evidence-based home visiting services. If HB 71 gains momentum and amends the Constitution, hopes for serving more families above the current 5 percent, and even surpassing the 10 percent served mark will be a far-off dream.
- *Child Care:* The child care sector was on tenuous ground even before the pandemic, and the shut-down of the industry last spring has left many providers struggling to keep their doors open. Beyond that, it remains challenging to serve more children in high-quality settings, provide appropriate compensation for child care teachers and staff that stops the turnover in the field, and increase access while addressing affordability for parents. Infusion of state funds for the Child Care Assistance and Child Care Services lines (Department of Human Services budget) has been challenging for several budget cycles. Currently, only 38,000 eligible infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children are enrolled in Child Care Works, meaning 81 percent, or just under 163,000, are unserved. Further, only 41 percent of this age group served through Child Care Works are in high-quality programs. While we have been fortunate to see support in the form of federal funding, limiting state funding increases with a CPI-U cap moving into future years jeopardizes the ability to build back a strong high-quality child care system following the pandemic so that parents can work and children can thrive.
- *Pre-K:* An area of wide bipartisan support since the enactment of the Pre-K Counts law in 2007, the Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance line items (Department of Education budget) have amassed a collective \$281 million in investments to serve a total of just under 61,000 eligible 3- and 4-year-olds in high-quality, publicly funded pre-k. In recent years, the Pre-K Counts line has averaged an increase of \$20-25 million – again above the CPI-U threshold established by HB 71. Despite this laudable effort by you and your colleagues, statewide 64 percent of children remain unserved; or just over 106,000 eligible 3- and 4-year-olds who will never be afforded this opportunity should HB 71 become reality. Recently a study of our state's Pre-K Counts program was released by the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill showing that kindergartners who attended a Pre-K Counts program exhibited positive gains in reading and math skills compared to children

who did not attend – and showing policymakers like you that you have made wise decisions in investing in our youngest learners over recent years. HB 71 would stand to irretrievably reverse this progress.

From the above examples, we hope you can see the clear impact this legislation will have on your constituents. A one-size-fits-all solution will only create new problems for children and families in your towns and communities benefitting from services like home visiting, child care and pre-k should you decide to support HB 71. The current funding levels of these programs support a small percentage of eligible families in need of supports and services and can either create the potential for waiting lists in the future or exacerbate those that already exist, hampering our state's COVID-19 recovery.

We ask that you consider these impacts and decide against allowing HB 71 or similar legislation from receiving further action in either chamber.

Thank you for considering our thoughts.

Sincerely,

Carol Austin, Executive Director, First Up
Diane Barber, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Child Care Association
Cara Ciminillo, Executive Director, Trying Together
Bruce Clash, State Director, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
Donna Cooper, Executive Director, Public Citizens for Children and Youth
Jen DeBell, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children
Steve Doster, State Director, Mission: Readiness
Blair Hyatt, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Head Start Association
Sara Jann, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Maternity Care Coalition (representing Healthy Families America)
Kari King, President and CEO, Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
Jessica Lipper, Government Affairs Manager, Mid-Atlantic, Nurse-Family Partnership
Amy Malen, Assistant Deputy Director, Allegheny County Family Support (representing Family Check-Up)
Julie O'Connor, Director, Norristown Family Center (representing Pennsylvania Family Center Network)
Kristen Rotz, President, United Way of Pennsylvania
Angela Seibert, Program Director, Outreach Center for Community Resources (representing SafeCare Augmented)
Karen Shanoski, Director, Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers State Office
Laura Stephany, Health Policy Director, Allies for Children

Cc: Representative Mark Longietti, Co-Chair, Early Childhood Education Caucus