

July 9, 2009

The Honorable Mike Pence, Chairman
House Republican Conference
1420 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Pence:

In “Trillions in Spending, Billions for Babysitters?” the House Republican Conference unfairly criticizes public investment in voluntary home visitation programs, likening its benefits to little more than babysitting services and even suggesting that a Baby Einstein DVD might be an accurate substitute. The Conference’s statement ignores decades of evidence and the research of respected scholars and scientists, which conclusively demonstrate that evidence-based home visitation can contribute to reductions in public expenditures on unnecessary health care, education, welfare and criminal justice expenditures by empowering low-income and at-risk children and families to improve their health, development, educational attainment and economic self-sufficiency. We are confident that with information regarding the benefits of evidence-based home visitation, the Conference will embrace its expansion in health reform as one of the cornerstones of promoting effective programs that improve the health and well-being of children and safeguard the public trust.

Voluntary home visitation programs provide in-home services to parents and children beginning prenatally up to kindergarten entry age. Trained home visitors, who come from a range of backgrounds including nursing, social work and early childhood education, meet with families in their homes on a twice-a-week, weekly, bi-weekly or monthly basis depending on the needs of the individual families to counsel them on maternal and child health and development, help improve parenting skills, promote school readiness, respond to challenges the parents and children face, and help them access needed mental health, education, and social services. Using research and evidence-based curriculum as the foundation, home visitors assist parents to help their children grow up to be healthy, ready to learn and reach their full potential. Home visitors also help link families to a broader range of services and supports in the community.

The results of various rigorous research studies show that evidence-based home visitation services produce measurable outcomes for children and families including:

- Improved pregnancy and child health and development outcomes;
- Increased school readiness and sustained success in school;
- Increased high school graduation rates;
- Reduced incidence of child abuse, neglect and injuries;
- Increased parental involvement;
- Reduced dependency on public assistance and increased economic self sufficiency; and
- Reduced involvement with the criminal justice system.

These benefits are real and lasting. They also can save public expenditures. For example, it is estimated that for every dollar spent on nurse home visitation, society can save as much as \$5.70. In fact, studies show that nurse home visitation reduces enrollment in the Medicaid and Food Stamps programs.

The home visiting grant program in the Tri-Committee's health reform discussion draft recognizes that the need for quality home visiting programs far exceeds the supply. It will provide funds to create and expand home visiting programs, and also go further and help link existing home visiting programs funded by other sources in states to maximize their effect on the lives of low-income and high risk families. It will build on what both science and practice tell us works.

We have been pleased by the continued bipartisan, bicameral support for expanding federal support for quality home visitation programs. During the 110th Congress, several Republican House members sponsored the Education Begins at Home Act (HR 2343), a bill that helped shape the language included in Section 1704 of the House Tri-Committee's health reform discussion draft. Similarly federal support for home visitation services had a number of Republican supporters in the Senate, most notably Senator Christopher Bond, an original sponsor of the bill, from Missouri, who knows first-hand the benefits of home visitation services.

Voluntary home visitation is an effective, research-based and cost-efficient way to ensure that all children have the opportunity to grow up healthy, safe, ready to learn and able to become productive members of society. Investing in this research-proven approach now will mean savings down the road in costs associated with health, education, child maltreatment and criminal justice. We urge Members of the Conference to support increased investments in quality evidence-based home visitation.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Humane Association
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs
Broader, Bolder Approach to Education
Children's Defense Fund
CLASP
Coalition for Juvenile Justice
Coalition on Human Needs
CWLA
DADS Unlimited
Family Violence Prevention Fund
First Five Years Fund
First Focus
Foster Care Alumni of America

Foster Club
Foster Family-Based Treatment Association
Generations United
Great Kids, Inc.
Healthy Teen Network
HIPPY USA
KidSave
National African American Drug Policy Coalition, Inc
National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Association of County Human Services Administrators
National Association for the Counsel of Children
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Center for Housing and Child Welfare
National Child Abuse Coalition
National Collaboration for Youth
National Council of Jewish Women
National Exchange Club Foundation
National Foster Care Coalition
National Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality
National Network for Youth
National Parenting Education Network
National WIC Association
National Women's Law Center
National Youth Advocate Program
Nurse-Family Partnership
Ounce of Prevention Fund
Parent-Child Home Program
Parents as Teachers National Center
PICO National Network
Prevent Child Abuse America/Healthy Families America
RESULTS
Society for Research in Child Development
Voices for America's Children