



7 June 2016

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly:

On behalf of the generals and admirals of Mission: Readiness – Military Leaders for Kids, we write in support of expanded access to high-quality state funded pre-k programs. Specifically we urge your support of investing an additional \$90 million in the FY 2016-17 state budget for the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs. This would allow 7,400 more children entry into pre-k, and expand the programs for 6,200 children to a full school year instead of a half-year. Please find attached to this letter a new report that documents how such an investment will help more children cultivate the skills they need to succeed later in life, including the increasingly important STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) skills needed for many careers including the military, should they choose that path.

Mission: Readiness is the national security organization of admirals and generals who have mobilized in response to data from the Department of Defense indicating that 72 percent of young Pennsylvanians between the ages of 17 and 24 are unable to join the military because they either lack proper education, are physically unfit, or have criminal records. A shrinking pool of eligible recruits is a threat to our national security, and we are troubled by the likely impact this will have on our future military preparedness.

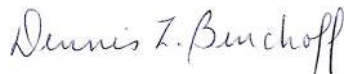
In the interest of maintaining a strong defense, we urge you to support expanding access to high-quality pre-k to all at-risk children and address affordability issues among the middle-class.

Decades of research have shown that high-quality early education can help put more kids on the path to graduation and later success. Specifically regarding STEM skills, a growing body of research suggests that developing STEM proficiency starts much earlier than high school, middle school or even elementary school. According to the Wall Street Journal (November 29, 2011), “Evidence is mounting about the importance of teaching math in preschool and kindergarten...if children don’t have good instruction and effective teachers in early grades, they are more likely to struggle later when they face more complicated concepts.” High-quality pre-k programs capitalize on the natural curiosity and exploration of young children and helps build an understanding of math and science concepts.

Unfortunately, far too few of Pennsylvania’s young learners have access to publicly funded high-quality pre-k. Among the approximately 175,000 Pennsylvania 3- and 4-year-olds at greatest risk of academic failure due to living in lower-income households, nearly 70 percent – or about 120,000 children – lack access to programs like PA Pre-K Counts and Head Start each year.

We understand and appreciate the difficult spending decisions that you face. It is important we do not overlook crucial investments that will contribute to the success of upcoming generations. To be sure, our military stands ready to protect against those who would threaten our security. In order to sustain our military strength for the future, we must ensure that future generations of young Americans will have the skills needed by a 21st century military.

Respectfully Submitted,



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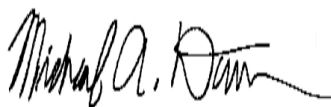
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