



6 June 2017

Dear Legislator,

The generals, admirals and other senior military leaders who are members of Mission: Readiness support targeted investments that will help young Americans grow up to be educated, healthy, and fit to do the work of our nation either as a soldier or a civilian.

Unfortunately, the pool of qualified men and women capable of military service today is diminishing. In Pennsylvania, 72 percent of Pennsylvania youth ages 17 to 24 are ineligible for military service due to problems with obesity, education, drug abuse, or crime, according to the 2016 Citizen-Readiness Index.

The index, produced by the Council for a Strong America, revealed two other sobering findings about preparedness. In Pennsylvania, 13 percent of youth ages 16 to 24 are unemployed and not in school, and 13 youth out of 100 ages 17 to 24 have an arrest record. The findings show that too many young adults aren't ready to contribute to their country, the economy, or their communities. They are disqualified from our military, and ill-prepared to work in our businesses.

Fortunately, a solution exists in greater access to early childhood education. Decades of research have shown that high-quality pre-K and other early childhood education programs can help better prepare our children by boosting high school graduation rates, deterring youth from crime, and reducing obesity rates, all while providing a significant return on investment.

Recognizing the tremendous benefits of early education, the Department of Defense has developed and invested in exemplary pre-kindergarten programs. These high-quality pre-k programs emphasize school readiness and are part of a larger comprehensive early care and education system that all active-duty military families have voluntary access to. This system has been recognized as a model for the nation, both in terms of quality and access.

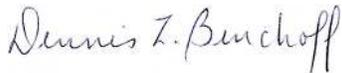
We thank you for the progress Pennsylvania has made in recent years by expanding funding for high-quality early learning programs like Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance; however, access to these high-quality early learning programs remains very limited. Approximately 113,000, or about 64 percent, of eligible Pennsylvania three- and four-year-olds do not have access to these publicly-funded pre-k programs due to insufficient funding.

In the interest of fostering the human capital that ensures future military readiness, we respectfully ask that Pennsylvania's policy makers follow the military's lead and enact a multi-year funding plan that better ensures voluntarily access to high-quality pre-K for all of the Commonwealth's 3- and 4-year-olds. Specifically, we ask you to grow state funding for the PA Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance line items by a combined \$75 million in the final FY 2017-18 state budget.

The knowledge and skill base demanded of the young people who join the armed services is great. High-quality pre-kindergarten plays a critical role in ensuring that our next generation is academically fit

and citizen ready. Increasing access to Pennsylvania's high-quality pre-kindergarten programs is not just an essential investment in a 21st century education system, it is also an essential investment in our future national security.

Respectfully Submitted,



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