



PENNSYLVANIA

June 13, 2016

Dear Legislators:

We respectfully request that you continue to include Pennsylvania's youngest learners at the top of your state budgetary priorities as we enter final budget negotiations for the 2017-18 Fiscal Year.

Specifically, we ask you to expand state-funded pre-k opportunities to an additional 8,400 eligible children by supporting the proposed \$75 million increase in new pre-k funding. We also ask you to expand evidence-based home-visiting services to an additional 1,700 at-risk families by supporting the proposed \$9 million increase for Community Based Family Centers, as well as supporting continued quality improvements to our state's child care system.

As leaders in Pennsylvania's chamber and economic development community, we are well aware of how much the success of our member businesses relies on the skills and capabilities of their employees. Unfortunately, a report released last year from ReadyNation shows that the statewide shortage of skilled workers, particularly those in the STEM fields, will continue to worsen in the coming years.

According to a Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry survey of more than 400 employers, 52 percent report having difficulty finding hires with adequate education, training, or credentials. This is especially true of technical or skilled positions. Pennsylvania businesses spend about \$188.9 million each year on retraining employees, and yet about 56% of employers expect the recruiting problem to worsen.

Sadly, these figures make sense since 28% of students entering the state system of higher education have to enroll in remedial courses, costing about \$153 million every year. Looking back even further, research shows that two-thirds of 8th graders are not proficient in math and science – two disciplines in which proficiency has become more and more critical for thriving in today's STEM-driven economy.

Reversing these trends takes a comprehensive approach that includes early education. Research data shows that children's knowledge of mathematics at preschool age (3- and 4-years old) predicts their later school success into elementary, middle and even high school.

Programs like Pre-K Counts, Head Start, and high-quality child care include topics and content that help lay this foundation for STEM abilities. Further, voluntary home-visiting programs coach parents on how to be their children's first and most important teacher.

We appreciate the progress that has been made in providing 6,200 additional children access to Pre-K Counts and Head Start over the past two years. We encourage you to continue to prioritize expanded

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access to early learning programs in the FY 2017-18 state budget. Such investments are important to our future workforce and economic security.

Best regards,

Mike Artim
President & CEO
Greater Johnstown / Cambria
County Chamber of Commerce

George Book, Jr.
President & CEO
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Steven Bradley
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Partnership Committee**
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