



22 May 2018

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, 71 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 Department of Defense.

Pennsylvania employers are also concerned about workforce readiness. According to a recent Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry survey, more than half – 52 percent -- say they have great difficulty recruiting qualified job candidates. Moreover, 56 percent believe it will get harder by 2021. Only 21 percent – one in five – rate the readiness of our current labor force for their jobs as excellent or good.

The skills employers need are all built on a foundation of solid academics, but too few Pennsylvania children are achieving in school.

- 61 percent of Pennsylvania eighth graders are NOT proficient in reading, 64 percent are NOT proficient in math, and 67 percent are NOT proficient in science, according to the National Assessment of Education Progress. For the many children in economically disadvantaged families, average math scores are 32 points lower than their better-off peers.
- Only 45 percent of Pennsylvania public school students meet all predictors of college success.
- More than 15 percent of Pennsylvania's high school freshmen fail to graduate within four years. Among economically disadvantaged students, it's nearly one quarter.

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 educational achievement and high school graduation rates, deterring youth from crime, and reducing obesity rates, all while providing a significant return on investment.

We thank you for the progress Pennsylvania has made progress 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 106,000 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 and economic readiness, we respectfully ask that Pennsylvania's policy makers continue to boost access to high-quality pre-k. Specifically, we ask you to grow state funding for the PA Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance line items by a combined \$40 million.



High-quality pre-kindergarten plays a critical role in ensuring that our next generation is academically fit and citizen ready.

Respectfully Submitted,

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