

December 15, 2021

Dear Senators,

COVID-19 and the resulting economic crisis have created unprecedented difficulties for virtually every sector of our economy. We know that there are many critical economic mitigation priorities you must consider, but we are particularly concerned about one specific sector: the American child care system. As retired senior military leaders who have managed and navigated complex crisis situations, we write with a warning: **America's child care sector is on the verge of collapse – failure to act could destabilize our economy and our future national security.**

Congress must act swiftly to send the Build Back Better Act, which contains meaningful investments necessary to stabilize America's child care system, to the president's desk.

We are grateful that Congress has taken significant measures to help Americans mitigate the long-lasting financial toll of the pandemic. While some areas of our economy are coming back to life, the effects of the pandemic have disproportionately impacted early care and education programs. Many of these programs faced severe worker retention and availability issues before the pandemic. New challenges have shuttered programs across the country, required early educators to take other jobs, and taken parents out of the workforce. Concerning new data has shown that the pandemic has driven female labor force participation to all-time lows; as the economy continues to reopen, progress is held back by both a lack of available child care and a child care worker shortage.

For more than a decade, our organization, Mission: Readiness, has supported efforts to sustain and expand access to high-quality early care and education programs. Our rationale is rooted in our careers safeguarding America's national security. Today, 71 percent of young Americans between the ages of 17 and 24 – the prime recruiting age – are not eligible for military service. This is largely due to educational deficits, obesity, or a record of crime or substance abuse. These challenges pose a direct and existential threat to the future of the all-volunteer force and America's ability to defend itself. There is no easy solution to reversing these trends – but, after years of analyzing the data, we believe early care and education is the closest thing we have to a “silver bullet” to eliminate this growing threat.

For decades, research has shown that high-quality programs can boost academic performance and make it less likely that young people will turn to crime. Studies in recent years have shown that programs can instill healthy habits that help children avoid developing obesity and the related, underlying health conditions that cannot simply be eliminated in a few weeks of boot camp. Meaningful bipartisan progress has been made at the federal, state, and local levels in recent years to expand access to these programs, help parents stay in the workforce, and secure these outcomes for children in need. Without quick and decisive action, we will backslide. America's future prosperity and security will pay the price.

We are heartened that leaders on both sides of the aisle have recognized the need to solve this crisis. We acknowledge difficult political realities, but would have preferred that Congress address this urgent crisis independent of other policy priorities. While we are not all united in support of all measures included in the so-called “Build Back Better” legislation passed by the House, we have come together on this issue because we believe that the investments in early care and education are too important to abandon and merit final passage. Doing so soon is imperative to ensure state legislatures can help early learning and care providers find their footing when 2022 legislative sessions begin in the coming weeks.

We urge you to immediately pass a final version of the Build Back Better Act containing significant investments in early care and education.

Very respectfully,

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