March 30, 2023

Governor Mike Parson
Lt. Governor Mike Kehoe
House Speaker Dean Plocher
House Speaker Pro Tem Mike Henderson
House Majority Floor Leader Jonathan Patterson
House Budget Chair Cody Smith
Senate President Pro Tem Caleb Rowden
Senate Majority Leader Cindy O'Laughlin
Senate Minority Leader John Rizzo
Senate Appropriations Chair Lincoln Hough

As law enforcement leaders, retired military leaders, and members of Council for a Strong America, we write to thank Governor Parson and his administration for his leadership for Missouri families and we urge you to support increased investments in early childhood programs. We appreciate Governor Parson and his administration for putting forth early care and education proposals, which include:

- Investing an additional $78.5 million to support low-income families in accessing child care;
- Making available new tax credits geared toward supporting businesses that providing child care to their employees as well as child care providers; and
- Expanding pre-K education.

Unfortunately, even though high-quality early education programs are shown to improve the long-term academic success of our kids, state-funded preschool programs currently serve less than two percent of Missouri's 3-year-olds and seven percent of 4-year-olds. In addition, more than half of Missouri kids live in child care deserts, areas in which there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots. There are also significant financial barriers to enrollment. Many parents cannot afford care and early learning supports, putting children from low-income families at an academic disadvantage compared to their peers.

While many studies show that quality early education can prepare children for kindergarten and lead to better short- and long-term academic outcomes, research also highlights impressive outcomes for

public safety. For example, a large study of Alabama's First Class pre-K program found that students who participated had lower rates of discipline for behavioral infractions in grades 1 to 12, particularly in middle school and high school. Research has demonstrated a link between childhood behavior problems and later crime, so pre-K's preventing behavior problems is important. Not only will this outcome impact public safety, but it also has implications for national security. Unfortunately, 71 percent of Missouri youth ages 17-24 are not eligible for military service due to various challenges, including having a criminal record.

We greatly appreciate the bipartisan support for increases in funding for early learning programs and high quality pre-K in recent years to serve more children and improve the overall quality of care. We urge you to maintain this commitment during the 2023 legislative session. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter in greater detail, please do not hesitate to contact Terra Pascarosa, Missouri State Lead, Council for a Strong America at tpascarsoa@strongnation.org.

Very Respectfully,

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U.S. Army (Retired)

Tracey Strevey Jr.
Major General
U.S. Army (Retired)

Cassie Strom
Major General
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Timothy Allen
Chief of Police
Bella Villa Police Department

Lucas Anderson
Chief of Police
Ironton Police Department

Kevin Chrisman
Chief of Police
Parkville Police Department

Kelly Clark
Chief of Police
Weston Police Department

Robert Connell
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Todd Davis
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David Dillard
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Sean Fagan
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Rolla Police Department

Christopher Hammann
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