



For Immediate Release

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**Kentucky Youth Advocates Urges Lawmakers to Protect Early Childhood
Education Programs for 7,000 At-Risk Children in Kentucky**

Jeffersontown, KY – More than 300,000 low-income children—including 7,000 children in Kentucky—are at-risk of losing federally funded early childhood services if Congress does not protect current investments in families and the American economy. With lawmakers set to approve a long-delayed FY 2011 budget in the coming weeks, Kentucky Youth Advocates is calling on Congress to maintain current funding for cost-effective early learning programs that provide immediate and future economic and social returns for individuals, taxpayers, and society.

“We urge Congress to safeguard funding for Early Head Start, Head Start, and child care services in the FY 2011 budget,” said Lacey McNary, Deputy Director. “Maintaining funding for these programs will help us build a smarter, healthier, and stronger America. These programs provide at-risk children with the early learning experiences needed for success in school, work, and life, and they help struggling low-income parents to continue working.”

Our nation cannot simply cut its way out of a budget deficit; it must reprioritize spending as well. Early childhood education is one of the most cost-effective public investments available—particularly during a budget crisis. Short-term costs are more than offset by immediate and long-term returns, including lower special education referrals, less remediation and grade retention, better health outcomes, lower crime, and increased family self-sufficiency and productivity.

Nobel laureate economist James Heckman, of the University of Chicago, found investments in quality early childhood education can generate up to 10 percent annual returns on investment.

“Head Start and Early Head Start Programs in Kentucky currently serve more than 17,500 low-income children and families, yet with one in four young children living in poverty in Kentucky, our extensive operations reach just a fraction of the children who need and qualify for Head Start, with thousands of children on waiting lists,” said Bob Wilcher, Executive Director of the Kentucky Head Start Association. “Any reduction in funding will not only prevent us from serving those on our waiting lists, it will force us to discontinue services to some of the children who are currently enrolled.”

“For Head Start and Early Head Start kids, the neediest children in Kentucky, the only hope of escaping the cycle of poverty is the chance to succeed in school. Research clearly shows that this process begins in the earliest years of life. High quality preschool programs like Head Start and Early Head Start are an essential investment in the future of Kentucky and our nation,” said Wilcher.

Earlier this year, Kentucky received \$32.5 million in federal funds to expand Early Head Start and Head Start. The funds allowed Kentucky to serve an additional 872 children and created 96 jobs. A

\$34.9 million federal investment in Kentucky Child Care Assistance Program allowed more low-income working parents to access quality, affordable child care for their children.

“We cannot move forward if we move backward in our current funding for these economically effective programs. Lawmakers must protect investments in early learning in the upcoming year. Cutting back would fail thousands of children and hinder the economic growth we all so desperately need—now and in the future,” said McNary.

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Kentucky Youth Advocates is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.