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2022-23 State Budget: Growth for Pre-k, Child Care and Home Visitation

Budget deal stops short of recurring funds to raise child care wages

HARRISBURG, PA (July 8, 2022) – Today, the principal partners of Early Learning Pennsylvania (ELPA), a statewide coalition of advocates focused on supporting young Pennsylvanians from birth to age five, issued the following statements regarding the final 2022-23 Pennsylvania state budget. ELPA operates four issue-based advocacy campaigns: Pre-K for PA, Start Strong PA, Childhood Begins at Home and Thriving PA.

Budget Expands Pre-K Access and Boosts Rates for Providers

“The Pre-K for PA campaign applauded the Pennsylvania General Assembly and Governor Wolf for once again expanding state funding for high-quality pre-k. The 2022-23 state budget includes \$60 million in new state funding for PA Pre-K Counts and \$19 million for PA’s Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program. Over the past eight years, investment in these critical early learning programs have increased by nearly 180%, serving tens of thousands more eligible children.

“Public investment in high-quality pre-k has become a consensus issue in Pennsylvania; aligning political parties, rural, urban and suburban communities, and families across the commonwealth on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that improves the life chances of Pennsylvania’s children. State leaders including Governor Wolf and Senator Pat Browne deserve recognition for their role in Pennsylvania’s continued expansion of Pre-K for PA. According to a recent poll, 90% of likely Pennsylvania voters said that formal early childhood care and education are important in helping set kids on a path toward leading healthy and productive lives.

“The \$79 million expansion will provide high-quality pre-k to over 2,300 additional young learners as well as increase rates for providers to support the early care and education workforce and address rising costs. The Pre-K for PA campaign thanks our more than 20,000 supporters for lending their voices to advance the power of pre-k to more of Pennsylvania’s youngest learners.”

Budget Utilizes One-Time Funds to Stabilize Child Care Workforce

“The Start Strong PA Campaign appreciates the General Assembly’s effort to stabilize child care programs by including \$90 million in one-time discretionary American Rescue Plan Act federal funding to support bonuses for child care staff. These funds will provide desperate child care programs the short-term solutions they need to alleviate the workforce recruitment and retention crisis.

“Unfortunately, this budget misses the opportunity to provide long-term solutions to the tens of thousands of families who are struggling to find child care to return to work, as it fails to address the root cause of Pennsylvania’s devastating child care crisis – a history of low wages, resulting in thousands of open staffing positions and more than 1,600 closed classrooms. Currently there are 32,400 children sitting on waiting lists in child care programs as a result of 7,000 vacant child care staffing positions statewide.

“Even though child care professionals have a significant impact on our children, their families, and our economic recovery, they make, on average, less than \$11.00 an hour. This budget does nothing to raise child care wages on an on-going basis to help solve for this systemic issue. It is not surprising that this industry, with 50% of professionals who work in it qualifying for government benefits, cannot compete for staff with other industries offering higher wages for less specialized skills.

“This budget also increases state child care funding by \$25 million, allowing families currently enrolled in Child Care Works to continue receiving child care subsidy up to 300% of poverty. These new funds should also have the flexibility to support the 160,978 children younger than age 5 who are eligible but have yet to be served. Start Strong PA partners have long encouraged the state to advertise Child Care Works to ensure every family who needs the financial support is aware and thus able to enroll their children in child care.

“Sadly, Pennsylvania’s elected leadership has fallen short on ensuring the availability of sustainable child care funds to stabilize the industry. Without a stabilized child care system, families will continue to struggle to find and afford high-quality child care significantly impacting their ability to return to work and remain employed.”

Budget Makes Historic Investment in Evidence-Based Home Visiting

“Childhood Begins at Home is pleased with the historic increase of \$15 million for evidence-based home visiting in the Department of Human Services budget to serve an additional 3,800 pregnant women, children, and families. In addition, \$1 million is earmarked for the Nurse-Family Partnership line item to serve 200 more families.

“Voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs mentor parents and others raising children and provide supports to address substance use disorders, develop school readiness, improve maternal and child health, promote economic self-sufficiency, and reduce abuse and neglect.

“Policymakers made a wise decision to diversify funding and meet families where they are in counties across the state so more parents and their children can access the research-proven benefits the home visiting models deliver.

“With this investment, we can increase service levels beyond the 5% of Pennsylvania families currently served.”

Funding Increases Included for Early Intervention Programs

“Our campaign is pleased the budget includes an increase of \$9.3 million for the Early Intervention Part C (infants and toddlers) program in the Department of Human Services budget. Some budget documents show an increase of \$12.2 million, which is also accurate, as it does not include additional stimulus dollars. The Early Intervention Part B (age-three-to-five) program in the Department of Education budget is receiving a \$10 million increase.”

In summary, the final 2022-23 Pennsylvania state budget included:

- \$60 million in additional funding for the state’s Pre-K Counts program, which will serve over 2,300 additional young children.
- \$19 million in additional funding for the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program.
- Level funding for the state Child Care Assistance line item.
- \$25 million in Child Care Services specifically to serve families currently enrolled in Child Care Works up to 300% of poverty or the state median income (whichever is lower).
- \$90 million in federal funding to provide one-time child care staff recruitment and retention bonuses.
- \$15 million in additional funding for evidence-based home visiting in the Community-Based Family Center line item and \$1 million for the Nurse-Family Partnership line item.
- \$9.3 million for the Early Intervention Part C (infants and toddlers) program through DHS (this figure also appears as \$12.2 million when stimulus dollars are not included).
- \$10 million for the Early Intervention Part B (age-three-to-five) program through PDE.
- Creation of a Pennsylvania Child Care Tax Credit equal to 30% of the federal credit to support working families.

About Pre-K for PA

Pre-K for PA launched in 2014 with the vision that every 3- and 4-year-old in Pennsylvania will have access to high-quality pre-k. Learn more at www.prekforpa.org.

About Start Strong PA

Start Strong PA launched in 2019 to support healthy child development, working families, and the economy by increasing access to and affordability of high-quality child care programs for young children. Learn more at www.startstrongpa.org.

About Childhood Begins At Home

Childhood Begins At Home is a statewide campaign launched in 2017 to help policymakers and the public understand the value of evidence-based home visiting and support public investments in the programs. Learn more at www.childhoodbeginsathome.org.

About Thriving PA

Thriving PA is a perinatal and child health campaign launched in 2021 and is working to ensure each birthing person, infant, and toddler in Pennsylvania has the opportunity for affordable, quality health care access. Learn more at www.thrivingpa.org.