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Working Families & Employers Win With Shapiro Early Education Budget Investments

HARRISBURG, PA (February 4, 2025) – Today, the principal partners of Early Learning Pennsylvania (ELPA), a statewide coalition of advocates focused on supporting young Pennsylvanians from birth to age five, applauded the early education workforce investments included in the Shapiro Administration’s 2025-26 state budget proposal.

Investments that will stabilize and reverse the exodus of early educators will directly benefit tens of thousands of teachers and other professional staff and help provider businesses remain open. Additionally, these investments will help reverse the billions of dollars in lost productivity and earnings suffered by working families and employers when families don’t have the care they need.

The partners of ELPA issued the following statements regarding Governor Josh Shapiro’s 2025-26 state budget proposal. ELPA operates four issue-based advocacy campaigns: Pre-K for PA, Start Strong PA, Childhood Begins at Home, and Thriving PA.

Budget proposal takes direct action to address PA’s child care teacher crisis

“Start Strong PA celebrates the Shapiro Administration’s proposal to directly invest in a child care teacher recruitment and retention program that will help keep teachers in the classroom so that working families have access to the care they need.

“The \$55 million recurring investment estimates an additional \$1,000 per educator increase for licensed child care programs participating in the child care subsidy program.

“With this investment, Pennsylvania is joining 18 other states that are directly investing in teacher recruitment and retention efforts to keep child care classrooms open for the benefit of working parents and the economy at large. Recent estimates show that gaps in Pennsylvania’s child care system cost working families, employers, and taxpayers a staggering \$6.65 billion annually — in lost earnings, productivity, and tax revenue.

“A September 2024 survey of 1,140 child care providers, representing 17 percent of providers, from across Pennsylvania, showed that 92% of child care programs reported challenges in recruiting staff with 85% struggling with teacher shortages leaving more than 3,000 unfilled positions statewide, thereby - eliminating child care for more than 25,000 Pennsylvania children.

“Start Strong PA looks forward to working with the House and Senate to ensure these urgently needed funds are included in the final budget and to the extent that state budget resources are available, increasing the investment so we can more fully address the child care crisis and its impact on working families and employers.”

Shapiro proposal increases Pre-K Counts rates to address continuing teacher shortage; additional action needed for Head Start

“Pre-K for PA applauds the Shapiro Administration’s continued commitment to address the historic teacher staffing shortage in the Pre-K Counts program. The 2025-26 budget proposal includes \$15 million in new state funding to help stabilize early learning providers by boosting per child rates to help combat inflationary pressures and staffing shortages caused by low wages.

“Opportunities for teachers to earn more in the K-12 system and other sectors have challenged Pre-K Counts providers to keep classrooms open and operate at full capacity. This investment is a critical next step in preserving state funded pre-k programs for our commonwealth’s youngest learners.

“However, we are disappointed that the Governor’s budget proposal fails to offer support for the commonwealth’s Head Start Supplemental programs that are facing similar staffing challenges. Pre-K for PA urges lawmakers to include increased funding in the final state budget to stabilize the Head Start workforce.

“Mitigating teacher shortages in Pennsylvania’s publicly funded pre-k programs is a necessary first step in ensuring that all children have access to this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Currently, 78,000 three- and four-year-olds in the commonwealth are eligible but do not have access to high-quality pre-k programs.”

Budget proposal also gives nod to significant workforce challenges in Early Intervention

“Early Intervention is a critical part of the Thriving PA campaign, as all children from birth through age five with developmental delays, regardless of family income level, must be identified, referred to, and provided necessary services to help them and their families reach their fullest potential. We appreciate the inclusion of a \$16.2 million increase in the governor’s proposal for Early Intervention Part C (infants and toddlers) in the Department of Human Services, while noting significantly more dollars are needed to adequately deliver Part C EI to children in Pennsylvania. A total of \$10 million of this overall investment aims to address key challenges in the sector including workforce shortages, and we urge policymakers to build on this momentum. The budget also includes a proposed increase of \$14.6 million for Early Intervention Part B (age three to five) in the Department of Education budget.”

Fewer young children, families and pregnant women will be served by home visiting services due to continued flat funding and loss of federal funds

“The Childhood Begins at Home campaign is concerned the proposed 2025-26 budget does not account for the loss of federal funds expiring in June nor the continued rising costs of providing these life-changing services. Without any

assurance that the state will account for rising costs and backfill federal dollars, this ultimately will mean fewer home visiting services for Pennsylvania families impacted by economic and social disparities.

“Home visitors are supportive partners who build a trusting relationship with families and help guide them through the early stages of having and raising a child. The evidence-based models show positive outcomes, from improving health for both children and adults to achieving economic self-sufficiency to reducing child maltreatment. Childhood Begins at Home will continue to work with policymakers in the legislature and the administration to ensure Pennsylvania does not unnecessarily see a reduction in families receiving and benefitting from evidence-based home visiting services.”

Governor Shapiro’s State Budget Proposal Includes:

- \$57.7 million in additional funding for child care (\$55 million in the proposed new Child Care Recruitment and Retention line item as well \$1.6 million in Child Care Services and \$1.1 million in Child Care Assistance line items).
- \$17 million in additional funding for the state’s Pre-K Counts program.
- Level funding for the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program.
- Level funding for evidence-based home visiting in the Community-Based Family Center line item and a small reduction in the Nurse-Family Partnership line due to a change in federal matching rates.
- \$16.2 million increase for the Early Intervention Part C (infant and toddler) program through DHS.
- \$14.6 million increase for the Early Intervention Part B (age three to five) program through PDE.

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 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.

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.