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Early Education Policy Update

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The following memo provides a summary of recent developments in public policy issues of interest to Early Childhood Advocates.

This Week in Washington

The President struggled all last week to gain traction on the proposed FY 2012 budget he sent to the Congress on February 14th. Though the bill called for a freeze overall in domestic spending, the news for the Department of Education was good—a \$2 billion increase over last year and funding for many innovative-sounding new initiatives which included \$350 million for the Early Learning Challenge Fund. Soon after the FY 2012 budget proposal was released, however, all attention was riveted on the House of Representatives, where a free-wheeling debate on a FY 2011 budget plan was underway. Tea Party Republicans said they were elected on a pledge to significantly shrink the size and cost of government, and they wanted to prove to the public they are as good as their word. The House Republican Leadership had no choice but to go along, and by week's end, they appeared ready for battle with the Senate.

In the wee hours of Saturday morning, February 19th, the House passed a yearlong Continuing Resolution (CR) that would cut funding across all government agencies by at least \$100 billion below the President's FY 2011 request. Over 400 amendments were debated, though little ended up being changed in the original legislation. For education, the CR provides 16 percent less in FY 2011 than in FY 2010. Significant reductions were adopted by the House for Pell Grants; Title I and Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); and a \$1.083 billion decrease in Head Start funding. In addition, many smaller programs were completely eliminated including the Parent Information and Resource Centers. Also, buried deep in the legislative text of the bill, was the elimination of the maintenance of effort requirements for the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program that was created in the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA). Eliminating this requirement would leave states no financial obligation to support the newly developed home visiting program in the ACA.

The reaction from the White House in response to the passage of the House CR was swift and clear—a promised veto. The Senate similarly rejected the measure as unsustainable. Speaker John Boehner's (R-OH) response to this rejection of the House bill was similarly unyielding. He pledged not to agree to an extension of the current CR beyond March 4th, unless it contains significant cuts in spending. This statement sets up the very real possibility of a government-wide shutdown in services. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and White House

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spokespersons have tried to sound conciliatory in an effort to mollify House Republicans, acknowledging that some reductions are inevitable, but they are pressing for a negotiated agreement rather than a show down.

The House adjourned early Saturday morning and the Senate left town last Thursday afternoon and both will be in recess through this week. When Members return, the action on resolving FY 2011 spending will switch to the Senate side of the Capitol where they will have until Friday, March 4th, to work out a plan. As one senior Democratic Senator put it, at that point, it will be all about who blinks first.

Home Visiting Summit Takes Place in Washington, D.C.

On February 16th and 17th, the Pew Center on the States, Every Child Succeeds and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center hosted a two-day National Summit on Quality in Home Visiting Programs in Washington, DC. Staff from Washington Partners (WPLL) attended two sessions: *Evidence-based Home Visiting* and *Perspectives from Public and Private Sector Leaders*. During the Evidence-Based Home Visiting session, Kim Boller, Senior Research Psychologist at Mathematica Policy Research and Diane Paulsell, associate director of human services research at Mathematica and the author of the recently released Supplemental Information Request (SIR) regarding the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, discussed what an evidence-based program is, and the different types of research that support what is known about evidence-based home visiting. Boller explained that when defining what an evidence-based program looks like, researchers reviewed definitional issues and what approaches had been used to review programs thus far. Paulsell then presented the finer points of the study Mathematica conducted and the outcomes that were identified. Defining the target outcomes, Paulsell explained that five targets were recognized: 1) child health; 2) maternal health; 3) child development and school readiness; 4) family economic self sufficiency; and 5) family violence and crime. The steps involved in the review process included identifying relevant studies; screening these studies; prioritizing program models; rating the quality of the studies; assessing the evidence of their effectiveness; and reviewing implementation information. After identifying 11 program models, the reviewers developed a rating system for the models which was tiered as "high", "moderate" or "low". The "high" rating was given to a program model demonstrating the strong ability to estimate unbiased impacts. Models that fell into this category had a low attrition rate and no "confounding issues." Those categorized by a "moderate" rating had uncertain impacts and not as low attrition rates. The "low" rating indicated a lack of confidence in the program model that the reviewers were able to assess. Overall, seven of the 11 models met the criteria. Paulsell also listed additional dimensions of evidence examined that included: quality of outcome measure; duration of impacts after the program ended; replication of impacts in another sample; the magnitude of effects; subgroup findings; unfavorable or ambiguous impacts; and evaluation independence. For more information, visit <http://homevee.acf.hhs.gov>.

The second session, *Perspectives from Public and Private Sector Leaders*, hosted Joan Lombardi, Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development, Administration for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services; Robert Gordon, Associate Director for Education at the Office of Management and Budget; John Schlitt, Director of the Pew Home Visiting Campaign; and Ellen Galinsky, President of the Families and Work Institute. Lombardi described the home visiting program as a foundation of the President's early childhood agenda that includes services for children prenatal through eight years old because it is "building a child's health at the beginning." She further stated, "We will be happy when third grade teachers know what home visiting is." The

challenge posed to home visiting programs is to meet specific goals and benchmarks consistently and to focus on proper implementation. Robert Gordon supported Lombardi's assertion that early childhood is a priority in the President's agenda and explained that the "President sees learning starting at birth." Gordon described how the "dollars are going to what works and it is very important for the early childhood community to keep working with the President to maintain this commitment to early childhood programs." Gordon acknowledged this may be a sensitive point, but it "is reasonable to ask for a different level of evidence." John Schlitt spoke about the importance of a public-private partnership within the early childhood space and the need to "build political support for home visiting programs." Pew has been working to partner with the private sector and build political support at the state level, Schlitt informed the crowd, but he shared his concern that collectively "we must figure out ways to maintain partnerships with the medical system to develop sustainable systems through healthcare financing." Schlitt emphasized the need to have leaders in commerce voicing their support for this issue as well as the need to build political champions at all levels. He challenged audience members to "link families who are benefitting from these programs with their Representative at a variety of levels" to share the impact these programs have on their lives. In conclusion, Lombardi stressed that the challenge to home visiting programs is fidelity of implementation and creating a new infrastructure and workforce in accordance with "this new law." But, she reiterated the importance to rise to the challenge.