

United States Senate

August 4, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 2010

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer,

We are writing to urge you to provide meaningful relief and enact bold solutions to address the child care and education crisis our country is facing.

Parents and educators have made extraordinary efforts throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, doing their best despite the digital divide, isolation, and other work and family obligations to guide children through their coursework and provide academic enrichment. At the same time, the pandemic has devastated education budgets across the country and pushed our child care system to the verge of collapse. While the full financial impact of the pandemic on Maryland's care and education systems is still unfolding, child care providers, K-12 schools, and institutions of higher education have already suffered hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue loss and added costs. Congress has an obligation to help fill the gaps and ensure that children, parents, and educators have the resources they need.

A survey conducted by the Maryland Family Network found that as of May 15, 2020, Maryland child care providers – already operating on thin margins before the pandemic – had lost more than \$51 million in revenue.¹ The School Superintendent Association (AASA) has calculated that an additional \$1.78 million would be required to meet necessary public health and safety guidelines, such as adequate distancing and personal protective equipment, to keep students, educators, and staff safe for the average school district that reopens for in-person learning.² Meanwhile, steep revenue cuts could result in Maryland losing over 8% of its K-12 educator workforce, worsening the state's current teacher shortage.³ Additionally, it is estimated that Maryland institutions of higher education incurred at least \$493 million in pandemic-related revenue losses during the spring 2020 semester – and a significantly greater funding gap is projected for the fall.⁴

¹ Maryland Family Network. (2020, June). *Caring During COVID: The Impact of the Pandemic on Maryland Child Care Providers*.

² The School Superintendent Association (AASA) & Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO). (2020, June). *What Will It Cost To Reopen Schools?*

³ Michael, G. (2020, April 30). *The Impact of the COVID-19 Recession on Teaching Positions*. Learning Policy Institute.

⁴ *As self-reported by Maryland institutions.*

Furthermore, the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the deep inequities that already existed in our woefully underfunded child care and education systems, particularly for low income students, students of color, students with disabilities, and English Learners. Prior to the pandemic, 40% of Black Marylanders and over half of Latino Marylanders lived in child care deserts, communities with little to no access to child care options.⁵ Maryland is now at risk of losing 78,375 licensed child care slots, deepening the child care crisis that many communities already faced.⁶ As school districts move to virtual learning environments, the disparity in home internet and device access has become an even more urgent issue. For example, Baltimore City Public Schools, where over half of students are low-income and 45% of students do not have access to computers or the internet at home, has needed to purchase 12,000 home computers and hotspots to address the digital divide of the district.⁷

In higher education, many students who were living on the financial margins prior to the coronavirus have been pushed into greater insecurity, and the intersection of historical inequities and the pandemic have created especially precarious financial conditions for minority-serving institutions. Historically Black Colleges and Universities have a median endowment that is one-eighth the size of historically white colleges and universities and 75% of their student populations are Pell Grant recipients, making these institutions particularly vulnerable to the financial shock brought on by the pandemic.⁸

For months, Senate Democrats have been urging Republicans to come to the table so that Congress could provide meaningful relief to child care providers, schools, colleges, and universities. In that wasted time, the funding crisis worsened exponentially. The recently proposed Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection and Schools (HEALS) Act fails to meet this moment and falls hundreds of billions of dollars short – dedicating only \$15 billion to child care, \$70 billion to K-12 schools, and \$29 billion to higher education. Moreover, the HEALS Act dangerously binds the hands of local school districts in their decision-making by severely limiting access to funds for those that elect to operate a virtual learning experience. With the child care industry on the brink, families forced into impossible financial decisions, and the health and safety of our students, educators, and staff at stake, we have long since passed the point where tepid investments tied up by politicized conditions are an acceptable response to this urgent crisis. We urge Congress to act swiftly to invest \$430 billion in child care and education relief, targeted at the students and families with the greatest need, as laid out in the Coronavirus Child Care and Education Relief Act. Key funding provisions include:

- **\$50 billion in emergency stimulus funding for child care** to prevent thousands of providers from closing, protect pay for child care workers, and ensure families can access these essential services.

⁵ Malik, R., Hamm, K., Adamu, M., & Morrissey, T. (2016, October 27). *Child Care Deserts*. Center for American Progress.

⁶ Jessen-Howard, S., & Workman, S. (2020, April 27). *Coronavirus Pandemic Could Lead to Permanent Loss of Nearly 4.5 Million Child Care Slots*. Center for American Progress.

⁷ ACLU of Maryland. (2020, July 6). *Learning During COVID-19*.

⁸ Thurgood Marshall College Fund. (n.d.). *About Historically-Black Colleges and Universities*.

- **\$4 billion to the FCC E-Rate Program** to ensure students and teachers have access to internet and devices at home for a quality virtual learning experience.
- **\$175 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Education Relief Fund** to stabilize school budgets and protect educator and staff positions, implement necessary public health guidelines, and support virtual learning, hybrid, or in-person learning, with no conditions on funding based on the model schools choose, and to support community school models.
- **\$12.9 billion for Title I and Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and McKinney-Vento** to support schools that serve low-income students, provide support to immigrant students and English Learner students, and to meet the needs of homeless students.
- **\$12 billion for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** to protect the rights of students with disabilities, to provide assistive technology, for professional development, and to ensure school districts are able to effectively meet student needs.
- **\$132 billion for the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund** distributed equitably to alleviate increased pandemic-related costs, with at least half of allocated funds dedicated to providing students with emergency financial aid and specific funding dedicated to Minority Serving Institutions.
- **\$33 billion for the Governor's Emergency Relief Fund** to support educational programs, as determined at their discretion, that have been significantly impacted by COVID-19.

We also encourage you to include funding and provisions to support community schools, a key education strategy in Maryland. These schools work with local partners to identify and address the unique needs of their students and families, an approach that is particularly necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We look forward to working with you to meet the urgency of this moment, support our child care and education systems, and tackle inequities to ensure Maryland's students, families, and communities recover from this crisis.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

