

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Jared Polis**  
**House Committee on Education and the Workforce**  
**ECESE Subcommittee Hearing entitled, “*Opportunities for State Leadership of*  
*Early Childhood Programs*”**  
**July 13, 2017**  
**10:00 a.m.**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding today’s hearing. Support for public investment to make quality early childhood education a reality for every child has broad support from across the political spectrum. As a father of a three and five year old this is not merely a partisan issue, but a personal one.

According to a 2017 poll sponsored by the First Five Years Fund, 82% of Republicans and 97% of Democrats believe that we should make quality early education more affordable and prevalent.

It’s not just the public who sees the benefits of early learning, the extensive research is clear too. The advantages of high-quality early childhood education include higher graduation rates, improved job outcomes, and longer life expectancies. Long-term, Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman estimates society receives \$7.30 in benefits for every \$1 invested in high-quality early learning programs.

Despite the nearly unanimous findings about early learning, our country ranks third-to-last amongst all developed nations for enrollment of three- to five-year olds. As lawmakers we should all find these results absolutely unacceptable.

The lack of access to early childhood education is something we’ve experienced firsthand in my home state of Colorado. The Colorado Preschool Program, or CPP, helps provide preschool for at-risk kids in our state.

Students enrolled in CPP are those who may come from low-income families, are dual language learners, are in foster care, or a range of other factors. Compared to their peers who don’t participate in CPP, CPP students are less likely to be held back and more likely to perform well in school even years after preschool.

CPP is an important step, and it’s opening doors for families across our state. *But it’s not enough.* The Colorado Department of Education predicts that nearly 8,400 at-risk four-year olds had no preschool available to them through CPP or Head Start in the 2015-16 school year.

For those 8,400 four-year olds, it's simply not fair that they won't have the same access and opportunity because there aren't enough slots in our system.

*Overall, only half of Colorado's three- and four-year olds are in preschool.*

The lack of availability and the rising cost of childcare hits working families especially hard. Many parents can't afford or don't have access to high-quality childcare. I represent several large four-year universities and community colleges in my district. I've heard countless stories of college students who have children who struggle to find the childcare their kids need.

Strong investments – at the local, state, and federal levels – in early learning will make an enormous positive difference for our future. But President Trump is running in the other direction. His administration proposes to cut hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding for early childhood education.

Fortunately at the state level, both red and blue state governors agree on the benefits of early childhood education. The National Governors Association, for the first time, included early learning support and investment in its platform. And many states, those led by both Republican and Democratic governors, are making bold investments in early learning with the support of federal programs like preschool development grants. These states know that the early years of a child's life lay the foundation for success in later years. They also know that the federal government is a partner, not a burden, in efforts to expand access to quality early learning and improve life outcomes.

The debate about the efficacy of early learning is over. It's undeniable that high-quality early childhood education has lifelong benefits for kids. Together, we should think creatively about how we can further support early learning and create more opportunities for more children.

I thank the witnesses for taking time out of their day to come testify and look forward to hearing from them about what more the federal government can do to ensure all children have access to quality, affordable, early learning opportunities.

I yield back.