



March 21, 2014

Dear Members of the General Assembly,

While it is widely understood that the health, education, and overall well-being of children are key to the Commonwealth's future prosperity, we do not believe that the Governor's proposed budget provides adequate funds to cover the costs of the government's appropriate role of helping support children, particularly in communities where weak economic conditions have overburdened or depleted the local ability to do so.

We know that every member of the General Assembly wants the best for the children in every community in the state. We urge you to consider and adopt the following specific options for improving the budget proposed by Governor Corbett so that your final budget includes the resources needed to protect children and ensure they grow up prepared for a healthy and prosperous adulthood.

Early Learning

- The Governor's FY 2014-15 Budget Proposal includes a \$31 million increase in Early Learning funding (\$10 million in state funds, \$21 million in federal). We urge an increase of no less than \$65 million in addition to the proposed \$31 million, to be made available to support the following line items:**

Department	<i>(in millions)</i>	Governor's Proposal adds	Additional \$ Needed
PDE	Pre-K Counts	\$10.00	\$22.80
PDE	Head Start Supplemental Assistance	\$0.00	\$13.30
DPW - Child Care Services/ Assistance	Professional Development	\$5.25	\$3.75
DPW - Child Care Services/Assistance	Child Care Subsidy	\$21.00	\$0.00
DPW - Child Care Services/Assistance	Fair Rates for Providers and Quality	\$0.00	\$25.80
			\$65.65

The Governor proposed \$10 million more in state funds to expand the Pre-K Counts program, and his budget proposal taps \$21 million in new federal funds to aid families on the child care subsidy waiting list.

Unfortunately, with respect to the Pre-K funds, the new resources will reach only about one percent more of the financially eligible children who need access to affordable, high quality Pre-K in Pennsylvania.

Moreover, the proposed child care subsidy funds fall far short of meeting the needs of the estimated 433,000 children under age five whom the state considers “at economic risk” for school failure. Despite the fact that most of these families have both parents in the workforce, far too many find themselves trapped in a vise: they must choose between paying for quality child care or covering essential household expenses. In order to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table, many families have no choice but to leave their young children in low cost, unregulated or low quality care that fails to prepare their children for school.

Children who are in high quality early learning programs do better in school and in life. While several other states have moved ahead and are providing high quality early education to all at-risk children – Maryland’s preschool program has dramatically improved reading at 3rd grade – our Commonwealth’s shortage of support for these programs increases the cost of public education and ultimately will cause a drag on the state’s economy. Most children who enter Kindergarten behind in their cognitive and social skills never catch up.

For these reasons, and because the FY 2014 budget proposal’s child care funding level remains \$60.5 million below the level it was in FY 2011, we urge the House and Senate to boost the overall spending for core early learning programs by at least \$65 million over the Governor’s proposal. This amount would increase the state's pre-K programs (PreK Counts and Head Start) by 35 percent, would provide a modest boost in reimbursements for high-quality child care programs that serve low-income children, as well as lifting the state imposed freeze on reimbursements that is in place for certain experienced childcare providers who serve low-income children.

K-12 Education

- **The Governor’s FY 2014-15 Budget Proposal includes a \$250 million “Ready to Learn Block Grant.” Instead we urge the adoption of a \$300 million increase to the basic education subsidy as well as reaching consensus on an equitable school funding formula**

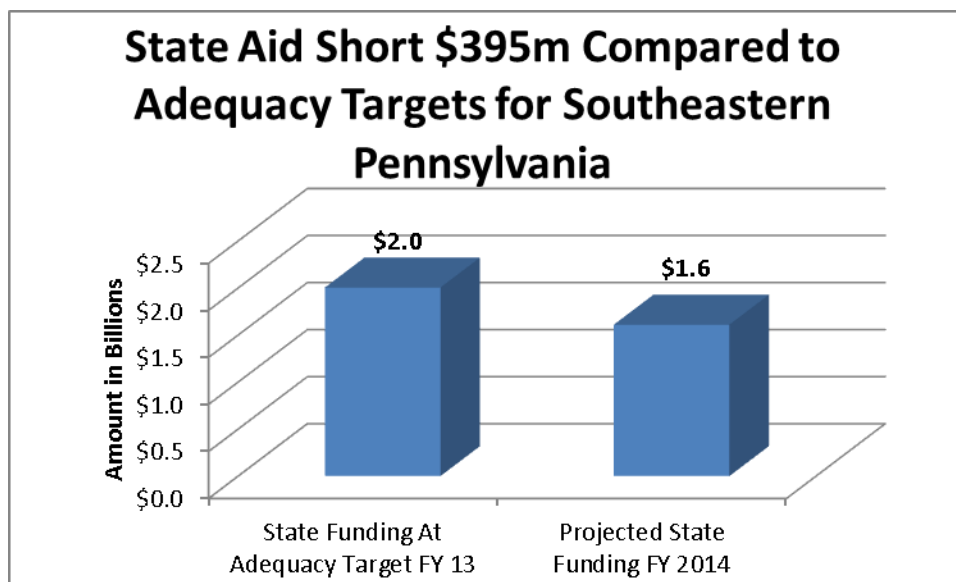
We urge you to do all that you can to fully restore the cuts made to the Basic Education Subsidy in FY 2011-12 and to use the balance of this fiscal year to forge a consensus on a sound, fair, and equitable school funding formula.

As you know most school districts across the state are struggling to offer students a quality education with significantly less state aid than they received in FY 2011-12 when districts lost \$980 million in state funding for basic educational expenses. The cut's greatest toll was in the poorest districts, the ones most dependent on state funding to compensate for both the higher cost of educating a poorer and more diverse student body and weak local tax bases.

If enacted, the funds in the \$250 million Ready to Learn Block Grant would restore to districts just 45 percent of the nearly \$1 billion FY 2011-12 cut in state aid. That's just not enough. Our students are suffering and so will the future of this state.

While Public Citizens for Children and Youth is concerned for all children in the Commonwealth, we focus our work specifically on the needs of the 460,000 K-12 students that attend school in the five southeastern counties.

The 62 districts in these five counties lost \$375 million in state aid for classroom operations in FY 2011-12. The Governor's FY 2014-15 proposed budget along with the modest restorations made since FY 2011-12, will still leave these districts \$261 million short of the level of state aid they received in FY 2011-12. Worse yet, even with these restorations, the districts in the five suburban counties would end up \$395 million short of where the 2008 costing out study indicated they should be.



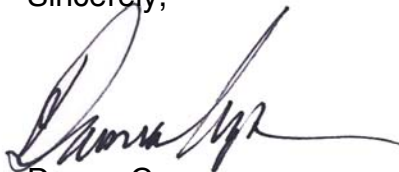
We all know that funding for education is not a silver bullet. Funds must be coupled with quality leadership and great teachers, as well as other strong supports that keep children healthy and read to learn. In large measure, that's what we have in Southeastern Pennsylvania: 54 of the 62 districts in the Southeast have graduation

rates above the statewide average; and the region has more than 340,000 students performing at or above grade level on state assessments, far above the state average test scores.

We commend the Corbett Administration for shining a light on the fact that parents and districts must do a better job with respect to early grade literacy and STEM education. However, limiting block grant funds to these special new initiatives at this time is not a wise investment of the state's limited resources. Too many schools have over crowded classes, schools with no nurses, librarians or counselors and course offerings that are too limited to give our students a fighting chance to succeed after high school. As a result, the goals for what the block grant funds are intended to achieve seem unrealistic given the condition of so many of our schools. Schools must first be able to offer the basics of what respected research indicates are necessary for a quality education that prepares students for the 21st century economy.

We recognize that the Governor and the Legislature must make difficult decisions to ensure the prudent use of the resources available to the Commonwealth. Similarly, wise choices must be made about what taxes to impose to support the programs deemed necessary and/or worthy of state investment. As you pass a budget this year, we urge you to fund the changes we propose so that more children enter school ready to learn and so that the Commonwealth is more quickly restoring the academic quality its schools were able to deliver in 2010.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donna Cooper", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Donna Cooper
Executive Director