

HB 20-1016 – Increase Quality in Early Childhood Education Programs
Testimony to the House Education Committee
February 4, 2020

Thank you Madame Chair and thank you to Representatives McCluskie and Wilson for introducing this important bill. My name is Bill Jaeger and I am the Vice President of Early Childhood and Policy Initiatives at the Colorado Children's Campaign. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 20-1016 to support quality in Colorado's early care and education programs.

Our understanding of the importance of the first few years of life has grown dramatically in recent years. Like building a house, the experiences a child has in the earliest years of life lays foundation for what is to come.

A child's brain undergoes a remarkable period of growth from birth to five years—producing more than 1 million new neural connections every second. This brain development is influenced by a child's relationships, experiences and environment. Dr. Jack Shonkoff, director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, said: "The message is pretty clear now from the science that the only way to dramatically decrease the gaps in achievement is to begin providing rich learning experiences much sooner than standard school aged entry."

Given that we have more than 150,000 licensed slots for children under the age of 6 in Colorado, supporting quality in each of these settings is vital to supporting the healthy development of young brains. When we ensure programs are of high quality, we are ensuring the best return on our investment in the earliest years. It is the quality of experiences in those early years that provide the strongest support for future development and school readiness.

Research shows that a child's earliest experiences affect brain development, that brain development is cumulative, and that the architecture of the brain can impede later language, cognitive, social, and emotional capacity. Investing in early learning and development is the best foundation we have to address our current and future human capital needs. These investments have both immediate and long-term benefits to the individual child and to society at large by ensuring that children start school ready to learn and preempting a lifetime of remediation at a far higher cost.

We thank the sponsor for bringing this bill forward and encourage your support of this bill and are happy to answer any questions you might have.