CLASP
CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

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President's Budget Says: Young Children Don't Count

(Washington, DC)—Every administration uses the budget to signal its priorities for the coming year. The message of the budget released today is simple and stark: children in low income families don't matter.

Instead of investing in the future through investments in young children, the proposed budget continues a pattern of disregard for the critical importance of our early childhood programs, ensuring a legacy that will *not* include support for the country's youngest and most vulnerable children.

"The President's budget cuts 200,000 children from child care assistance programs in two years—a breathtaking signal of the low priority this administration places on investments in working families," said Danielle Ewen, Director of Child Care and Early Education Policy at CLASP.

With four out of ten children under age 6 living in low-income households (under 200 percent of poverty) and facing multiple risk factors that affect their chances for success in later life, investments in young children are increasingly important.

In order to thrive, children need good health, nurturing families, and positive early learning experiences. Yet, our nation's spending priorities do not reflect this common sense.

In 2006, federal investments targeted to children (including spending on education, child care, health care, and other social support investments) comprised less than 2 percent of GDP, according to The Urban Institute. The president's proposed budget continues this alarming trend by disinvesting in supports for children and low-income families.

The administration's budget proposal sends a clear message that supporting young children, and their families, is not a priority by proposing:

- a freeze on discretionary funding for CCDBG for the *seventh consecutive year.* According to the administration's own estimates, 200,000 children are projected to lose child care assistance by 2009. This is in addition to the thousands of children who have already lost assistance.

- funding for Head Start that falls short of meeting even inflationary increases, let alone provide for any new investments in quality or children served. Head Start currently serves about half of eligible children, and Early Head Start serves less than 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers.

Across the country business leaders, economists, neuroscientists, researchers, and policy experts alike have championed the importance of investing in quality early childhood programs for our nation's youngest children. Research shows that when parents access child care assistance they are more likely to be employed, to have higher incomes, and to remain off of welfare, according to CLASP.

Research shows that the quality of a program that is most important to a young child's development. It takes resources to ensure that all programs have qualified staff with appropriate training who are well compensated; important standards such as low teacher-to-child ratios and small group sizes; developmentally appropriate curriculum and practices; and linkages to vital health services and family supports.

Congress should take the lead and send a message that they have not forgotten vulnerable children and families. Congress should reject President Bush's proposals to disinvest in these important programs and, at a minimum, make the following investments:

- Increase funding for CCDBG by $874 million to restore the program to 2002 inflation-adjusted funding levels. This would provide child care assistance to an additional 145,000 children, helping to restore help to those who have lost it in years of flat funding.

- An increased investment of $1.072 billion for Head Start will allow programs to serve additional children in both Head Start and Early Head Start as well as begin to make needed investments in quality as outlined in the 2007 reauthorization.

It is time for the federal government to respond to decades of research; investing in programs that support low-income children and their families will payoff now and into the future.

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To view the Child Care Team's full analysis, visit http://clasp.org/publications/cc_2009_budget.pdf
To set up an interview with Danielle Ewen, contact Cyra Master at (202) 906-8027.

The Center for Law and Social Policy is a national, nonprofit organization working to improve the lives of low-income people through research, policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy.