The Case for Action: Early Child Care and Education

High-quality early care and education is critical to growth and development

- The earliest years of life are a time of rapid brain development.
- Most achievement gaps and disparities in socio-emotional development are in place before kindergarten.
- High-quality early education improves outcomes related to physical and behavioral health, poverty, lifetime earnings, and even incarceration rates.
- These improved outcomes produce a societal return on investment of $4 to $16 for every dollar spent.

Families are struggling to balance work and child care commitments

- The majority of families today no longer have a full-time stay-at-home caregiver.
- 58% of two-parent families with children have both parents working.
- 69% of single mothers with children under 6 are employed outside the home.
- 2/3 of mothers bring home at least 1/4 of family earnings.
- More than 4 in 10 mothers are primary breadwinners.

High costs are straining family budgets

- U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services affordability standard for child care: 7% of family income.
- In reality, the average cost of early child care and education in the U.S. takes up:
  - 10% of household income among married co-parents.
  - One-third of income for average single-parent household.

Average cost of early child care and education in the U.S.

- Cost varies substantially by location, including disparities between urban and rural settings.