

# Too much at risk: Ryan poverty plan puts children needing early learning at risk <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) released his plan to combat poverty this morning. It flies in the face of the strong support that the public has expressed for increasing investments in early learning.

Just last week, in a new poll by the First Five Years Fund, 85 percent of respondents said that giving children a strong start is extremely or very important - making it the number-two policy priority, just behind increasing jobs and economic growth. A proposal to provide over \$10 billion a year to offer all children in low-and moderate-income families access to high-quality preschool programs received strong support from Republicans, independents and Democrats. Support was also high for helping parents find affordable, high quality child care.

In his poverty proposal today, Ryan took a dramatically different approach. Federal funding for child care and early learning through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) would be combined with funding for ten other programs, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and housing for low-income families, and converted into a single block grant for states. No new funding would be allocated for the block grant. This "pilot program" would begin in a number of states in order to, in theory; allow them greater flexibility in providing services. It's an approach we've seen before - and just the opposite of what we need to help children and families.

Recent child care and early learning efforts - particularly work to reauthorize CCDBG and revise regulations for the program - have focused on increasing accountability and improving quality. Ryan claims child care assistance providers would still "be subject to high safety and training standards" as laid out by the Senate, but combining programs into a block grant can have disastrous effects.

CCDBG isn't the only early learning program that Rep. Ryan would convert into a block grant, either. He's proposed to do the same with Head Start, promising to allow states to add Head Start's comprehensive services to their prekindergarten initiatives but including no additional funding to do so as well as allowing states to dilute other key standards.

As the Center for American Progress points out, block grants can decrease program accountability and make them vulnerable to future funding cuts. Future cuts are exactly what low-income families don't need, particularly when it comes to affording high-quality child care and early education. Strong state and federal partnerships to support young children require increased investments. Already, too many children are falling through the cracks:

- Only one in six children eligible for child care received it in 2009 (the most recent year for which data are available).
- The average number of children receiving federal child care assistance each month in 2012 (the most recent year for which data are available)-1.5 million-was lower than in 2009, and actually at the lowest level since 1998.
- Head Start reaches only about two-fifths of eligible preschool-age children, and Early Head Start reaches less than 4 percent of eligible infants and toddlers.

There are plenty of red flags in Ryan's proposal. It is not clear how it relates to his FY 2015 budget passed by the House that included major cuts to safety net programs. Today's focus on alleviating poverty while eliminating some programs and failing to provide sufficient funding doesn't add up. Finally, it ignores the public's deep support for a greater focus and new investments in early learning by diminishing the federal role in child care and Head Start. Instead, it leaves the children who don't have access to the early learning experiences they need to succeed and their parents who don't have the child care they need to work and to support their families with less.

**Read online** <sup>[2]</sup>

**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** subsidy <sup>[4]</sup>

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#### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/07/too-much-risk-ryan-poverty-plan-puts-children-needing-early-learning> [2]

<http://www.nwlc.org/our-blog/too-much-risk-ryan-poverty-plan-puts-children-needing-early-learning-risk> [3]

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