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October 6, 2011

The Honorable Arne Duncan
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave SW
Washington DC, 20201

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
US Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington DC, 20201

Dear Secretary Duncan and Secretary Sebelius,

We are writing to express our support for the State of Washington's Early Learning Challenge application. Stand for Children is a grassroots advocacy organization focused on ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, get the quality education they need to succeed. We know that accomplishing this mission in Washington requires high-quality early learning programs for our state's children, so that our students are prepared to learn beginning on day one.

Washington State has been working to develop a solid foundation for its early learning system, and Stand for Children has played a role in these efforts through community engagement and advocacy. An Early Learning Challenge grant will allow the state to build on this foundation and create a sustainable system with improved outcomes for our students. Last year, Stand for Children supported legislation to implement a kindergarten readiness inventory (WaKIDS) in our poorest schools. Thanks to those efforts, this school year 11,000 of our state's poorest students will have their individual needs met because of the information gathered by this inventory. In addition, we have supported establishing a deadline to expand this program statewide by the 2014-15 school year. The Early Learning Challenge grant will support the state in accomplishing this goal, so that this tool can be used to support all of our state's kindergarten students and their families.

Stand for Children will continue to advocate in Washington State for programs like WaKIDS that help prepare students for the K-12 classroom and support them in that transition. We are committed to continuing to educate our communities about the importance of early learning and civic engagement. This advocacy and community involvement will serve to support the Department of Early Learning and other early learning leaders in the state as they implement the elements of an Early Learning Challenge grant, and to ensure the funding is used effectively and efficiently.

Washington State has already made building a world-class early learning system a priority. Our Early Learning Challenge application outlines the steps we can take to enable us to scale up effective programs and create enduring systems and structures. With these tools in place, more of our students will enter the K-12 system ready to learn, bringing us one step closer to our goal of ensuring all our students – no matter where they live or who they are – are career-and-college ready when they graduate from high school.

Sincerely,

Shannon Campion
Executive Director