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Good morning. First, I want to thank Senator Clinton and Senator Casey for their leadership in taking important new steps towards improving the lives of young children, and ultimately, to improving our country's education system. Also, thanks to John Podesta and the Center for American Progress for the fine work you do every day to bring attention to the nation's most critical issues.

I am proud to serve as Executive Director of Pre-K Now, an education and advocacy organization, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and other foundations; together, we lead a movement to secure high quality pre-k for every three and four year old in this country. Pre-K Now's work builds on the decades of successful advocacy by many people with us today and I want to thank them as well for their dedication to our nation's children; they have helped to pave the way here.

"Here" is this remarkable moment in which we find ourselves: with an unprecedented level of support for pre-k at the state level that has "trickled up" to the national level. Today, I am delighted to address how the federal government can begin supplementing the incredible efforts states are making to build high quality pre-k systems, not just for children at risk, and in many states, not just for four year olds.

Indeed, the two bills discussed today, "Ready to Learn" and "Prepare All Kids," are part of an unprecedented level of interest in pre-k and young children on Capitol Hill:

- Speaker Nancy Pelosi convened the first-ever National Summit on America's Children on May 22nd to bring Members of Congress together with researchers and discuss the benefits of early investments in services and supports to improve the lives and outcomes of our nation's children.
- Both the House and Senate versions of the Higher Education Act include special measures to offer new student loan relief to students who become pre-k teachers.
- Both the Senate and House Head Start bills include provisions to increase the number of Head Start teachers with BA degrees which will lead to higher quality programs and help professionalize the field of early learning.
- The Joint Economic Committee, with leadership from Senator Casey and Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, held a hearing on June 27th to emphasize the economic benefits of investing in young children. The testimony of Nobel Laureate James Heckman and others, including Harriet Dichter of the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, pointed out the extraordinary benefits to

communities of investing in pre-k programs, findings consistent with decades of research documenting the long-term success of children who participate in pre-k.

Before commenting specifically on the two bills and another that will soon be introduced by Congresswoman Hirono from Hawaii, I would like to highlight the phenomenal growth in state funded pre-k.

From FY05 to FY07, state funding for pre-k increased from \$2.9B to \$4.2B, which is about a 45% increase. In FY07, more than \$450 million new state dollars were appropriated for pre-k across the country. This year, total appropriations will at least match that. In their state budgets this year, 29 governors proposed increases for pre-k and not one governor proposed a decrease. This compares with only 11 governors just three years ago.

Among the remarkable success stories this year:

- In Pennsylvania, owing much to the leadership of the governor and advocates, the legislature passed a budget after a period of impasse, appropriating \$75 million new dollars to Pre-K Counts. This increase would serve an additional 11,000 children.
- In New York, Governor Spitzer proposed a 33% increase in funding for pre-k for a total of \$395 million, as part of a four-year plan to provide pre-k for all. The legislature exceeded the governors' proposal by increasing pre-k funding by \$146 million for a total of \$450 million, serving 44,000 additional children.
- In Iowa, Governor Culver proposed and the legislature followed with a budget that provided more than \$60 million over four years to develop and expand pre-k in that state to all four year olds.
- When the North Carolina legislature reached a budget impasse, the governor issued an executive order to fully fund his \$59.3 million proposed expansion of the state's *More at Four* program for a total of \$143.9 million. This increase will serve an additional 10,000 children.

But even with this incredible growth in state-funded pre-k, too many families still do not have access to quality pre-k programs. Eleven states provide no support to pre-k, and according to the latest research by the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER), per-child spending has declined. States will welcome support from the federal government as long the funding level is high and the federal legislation recognizes and builds on state efforts to improve quality, increase access, and ensure that every child enters kindergarten prepared.

Both the "Prepare All Kids Act" and the "Ready to Learn Act" set new benchmarks for federal investment in pre-k. These pieces of legislation draw on 40 years of research and best practices at the state level, experiences that have demonstrated the importance of high quality standards, including:

- Teachers with bachelor's degrees in every classroom
- Teacher-child ratios of one to ten and class size limits of 20

- Developmentally appropriate, research-based curricula
- Ongoing teacher professional development
- Clear reporting instructions to ensure that progress is being made

Pre-K Now also commends the bills and their sponsors for incorporating the strengths of the diverse delivery system already in place in many states, which allow community-based pre-k providers, as well as schools, to be eligible for federal funding.

Each bill has its own particular strengths:

- The “Prepare All Kids Act” allows states six years to reach the goal of having a teacher with a B.A. degree in every classroom. Pre-K Now believes this much time is needed in order to allow those teachers currently in the field the opportunity to obtain a teaching degree and the commensurate salary.
- The “Ready to Learn Act” allows states the flexibility to provide comprehensive services, including health screening and referral services, recognizing that all aspects of a young child’s development are important and interrelated.
- Senator Casey’s bill has a 10% infant-toddler set aside; this means that programs for our youngest and most vulnerable children will grow as pre-k grows.
- Senator Clinton’s bill is intended to be a part of the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, an action Pre-K Now strongly supports and called for last year in testimony before the Aspen Commission on No Child Left Behind. This bill also places the pre-k program in the Department of Education, making it clear that “early learning” is, in fact, a fundamental part of the educational process.

We are delighted to also be working with Congresswoman Mazie Hirono on a pre-k incentive grant bill to support states in their efforts to improve the quality of state-supported pre-k programs. We expect that bill will be introduced shortly and could become part of No Child Left Behind.

I want to take this opportunity to highlight a special group of children, one that deserves our attention. At this point, neither “Prepare All Kids” nor “Ready to Learn” speaks to the special situations of young children in military families who may be stressed due to the deployment of a parent (or both parents) or left without a pre-k option when the family moves from Oklahoma or Georgia, which provide pre-k to all children, to South Carolina or Virginia, which have more limited programs. Military families and their young children need the consistency and strong foundation a pre-k education can provide—and providing this must be a national priority.

While we are here to applaud these important new proposals for our youngest children, it’s important to remember that these are part of a more comprehensive children’s agenda to ensure that every child has a chance to meet their innate potential and succeed in both school and life. With this in mind, we must remember that:

- While it is best to start building a pre-k system for children at risk, we can't stop there. Access to pre-k shouldn't depend upon one's address or income bracket. All three and four year olds – not just some of them - are going through one of the most critical phases of brain development in their lives, and we must help parents make the most of this window of opportunity by providing a pre-k education.
- More children need to be covered by SCHIP and provided with the best quality medical care available. By ensuring that systems for screening children for needed services and funding for mental health services are available within the pre-k system, we meet the needs of the whole child (and the family).
- As the credentials for pre-k teachers are raised to be commensurate with those of teachers in the K-12 system, equal salaries must be provided in order to attract and retain talented, dedicated early educators.
- Pre-k curricula and services need to be fully aligned with public schools to ensure that the progress made in the early years is not lost as children progress through kindergarten and the early grades.
- And, finally, Head Start and child care funding must be dramatically increased, because the success of pre-k is intricately tied to these two important and underfunded programs.

Pre-K Now looks forward to working with both Senator Clinton and Senator Casey, with Representative Hirono, and with others in the Congress to implement a comprehensive agenda for every child in America. Only with a strong commitment from the states and the active partnership of the federal government can pre-kindergarten programs deliver the maximum benefit to children, families, and our communities.