



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

November 22, 2023

The Honorable Shalanda Young
Director, Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Ms. Young,

Board of Directors

Lee Beers
Abel Covarrubias
Felicia DeHaney
Chandra Ghosh Ippen
Walter S. Gilliam
Mary Margaret Gleason
Brenda Jones Harden
Kathy Hirsh-Pasek
Jon Korfmacher
Tammy Mann
Matthew E. Melmed
Andrew N. Meltzoff
Lisa Mennet
Michelle Meyercord
Catherine Monk
Michael R. Olenick
Joy Osofsky
Helen Raikes
Michelle Sarche
Eugene P. Stein
Barbara Thompson
H. Marcel Wright

Directors Emeriti

Samuel J. Meisels
Kyle D. Pruett
Arnold J. Sameroff
Jack P. Shonkoff

Founding Members

T. Berry Brazelton
Selma Fraiberg
Stanley I. Greenspan
J. Ronald Lally
Bernard Levy
Reginald S. Lourie
Peter B. Neubauer
Robert A. Nover
Sally Provence
Julius B. Richmond
Albert J. Solnit
Leon J. Yarrow

Executive Director

Matthew E. Melmed

On behalf of ZERO TO THREE, the nation's leading nonprofit dedicated to ensuring all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life, I am pleased to submit recommendations for the President's budget for Fiscal Year 2025 to address the needs of our nation's eleven million babies and their families. ZERO TO THREE recently released the [State of Babies Yearbook: 2023](#), which identified five imperatives where urgent action is needed at the federal level to promote healthy development, especially for babies of color and those experiencing low-income: the crisis in maternal health, opportunities to promote infant and early childhood mental health, the importance of early care and education as a public good, the hidden developmental threat of unstable housing, and economic insecurity that engulfs many babies.

Like the President, ZERO TO THREE believes bold action is needed to support early childhood development and appreciate the administration's leadership on policies that address these priorities, including 12-months post-partum Medicaid coverage and actions to mitigate climate change and reduce environmental hazards for young children through lead abatement. The FY25 budget process provides additional opportunities for the administration to recommit on aligned Biden-Harris priorities, including the reinstatement of the enhanced Child Tax Credit, fully funding the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women and Children (WIC), instituting a national Paid Family and Medical Leave policy, and expanding access to affordable housing.

In addition, ZERO TO THREE applauds the President's leadership on early care and education. The Administration's regulatory action and commitment to greater investment is unprecedented. ZERO TO THREE fully supports the Administration's push for \$16 billion in supplemental funding for the child care emergency facing many families and providers and urge the Administration to leverage the federal budget as a visionary and values document to once again call for a long-term, mandatory investment that moves our nation closer to establishing early care and education as a public good available to all Americans.

ZERO TO THREE is also requesting that the FY25 President's budget elevate several less heralded programs and make targeted investments for babies that otherwise get lost in debates around nondefense discretionary spending and topline numbers. This spring, ZERO TO THREE and First Focus released, [The Baby](#)



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Board of Directors

Lee Beers
Abel Covarrubias
Felicia DeHaney
Chandra Ghosh Ippen
Walter S. Gilliam
Mary Margaret Gleason
Brenda Jones Harden
Jon Korfmacher
Tammy Mann
Matthew E. Melmed
Andrew N. Meltzoff
Lisa Mennet
Michelle Meyercord
Catherine Monk
Michael R. Olenick
Joy Ososky
Helen Raikes
Lauren A. Smith
Paul Spicer
Eugene P. Stein
Barbara Thompson
H. Marcel Wright

Directors Emeriti

Samuel J. Meisels
Kyle D. Pruett
Arnold J. Sameroff
Jack P. Shonkoff

Founding Members

T. Berry Brazelton
Selma Fraiberg
Stanley I. Greenspan
J. Ronald Lally
Bernard Levy
Reginald S. Lourie
Peter B. Neubauer
Robert A. Nover
Sally Provence
Julius B. Richmond
Albert J. Solnit
Leon J. Yarrow

Executive Director

Matthew E. Melmed

[Share of the Federal Budget](#), showing that the share of the federal budget dedicated to babies makes up a very small fraction of the overall budget and is less than the share of the overall population of children who are under the age of three. In fact, spending on babies has declined since 2017 as a share of the federal budget and hasn't kept pace with investments for older children. It's imperative that the President's FY25 budget invest in programs that are tailored to babies and families, impactful in terms of advancing equity and developmental outcomes, and for which the Administration's leadership has made a difference in increased funding. We urge the Administration to prioritize investments for the following:

- [Preventing and mitigating child welfare involvement: Infant Toddler Court Program](#)
- [Supporting critical developmental foundations: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Grants](#)
- [Leveraging primary care to support development: Early Childhood Development Expert Grants](#)
- [Building an equitable early care and education system for babies: Targeted Investments in Early Head Start, Child Care, and Early Intervention](#)

Infant-Toddler Court Program

Each year, over 100,000 children ages 0-3 are removed from their families and placed in foster care, representing the largest group, about 24%, of all children in the system. The National Infant-Toddler Court Program funded through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) works with states and communities by implementing Infant Toddler Court Teams (ITCTs) to reshape the way professionals and service providers ensure families with young children have access to comprehensive services and trauma-responsive practices in their communities and that states build equitable, coordinated, and aligned systems of care that prevent child welfare involvement. A bill to authorize this critical program, the Strengthening America's Families Act ([HR 5140](#)), has bipartisan support and an evaluation of the program has shown considerable success:

- Maltreatment reoccurs in fewer than 1 percent of the cases served by ITCTs, an astonishingly low rate far below the national standard of 9.1 percent.
- The ITCT approach is cost effective with short-term public savings of \$14,000 per family exceeding program costs by 64 percent.
- Ninety-three percent of infants and toddlers in the program achieved permanency within a year compared with the national rate of 18.6 percent.
- Substance use disorders, a reason for removal for almost 70 percent of foster care cases, did not lengthen permanency outcomes. Three-quarters of parents needing treatment started within a week.



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Board of Directors

Lee Beers
Abel Covarrubias
Felicia DeHaney
Chandra Ghosh Ippen
Walter S. Gilliam
Mary Margaret Gleason
Brenda Jones Harden
Jon Korfmacher
Tammy Mann
Matthew E. Melmed
Andrew N. Meltzoff
Lisa Mennet
Michelle Meyercord
Catherine Monk
Michael R. Olenick
Joy Ososky
Helen Raikes
Lauren A. Smith
Paul Spicer
Eugene P. Stein
Barbara Thompson
H. Marcel Wright

Directors Emeriti

Samuel J. Meisels
Kyle D. Pruett
Arnold J. Sameroff
Jack P. Shonkoff

Founding Members

T. Berry Brazelton
Selma Fraiberg
Stanley I. Greenspan
J. Ronald Lally
Bernard Levy
Reginald S. Lourie
Peter B. Neubauer
Robert A. Nover
Sally Provence
Julius B. Richmond
Albert J. Solnit
Leon J. Yarrow

Executive Director

Matthew E. Melmed

To support this critical work, ZERO TO THREE is asking the Administration to include two items in its FY2025 Budget: (1) \$25 million, an increase of \$7 million over FY23 enacted levels, to expand the grant program and capacity building supports to reach additional states and sites; and (2) support enacting the Strengthening America's Families Act to authorize this program and ensure its continuation.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Grants

There is growing concern about the mental health status of children and youth, yet the mental health needs of babies are still often overlooked. This is particularly troubling as *Yearbook* data show continued elevated emotional distress levels (stress and loneliness) for parents of very young children and corresponding externalizing behaviors for babies, which is consistent with what we know about how a baby's well-being is closely tied to that of parents and caregivers. Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) grants help fund services and support along a continuum of promotion, prevention and treatment, such as providing consultation to early educators and pediatricians on social and emotional development, expanding and diversifying the infant and early childhood mental health workforce, providing maternal depression screening and services, strengthening systems for identification and referral, and evidenced-based mental health services to young children and caregivers.

To better support IECMH services in communities across the country and integrate them into mental health systems, ZERO TO THREE asks that the Administration include in its FY2025 Budget: \$50 million, an increase of \$35 million over the FY23 appropriated amount, for the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Promotion, Intervention, and Treatment Grant program. This funding will allow entities such as State agencies, tribal communities, and universities or medical centers in different stages of developing IECMH services to receive technical assistance and build capacity to expand infant and early childhood mental health services in their respective communities.

Early Childhood Development Expert Grants

Integrating early childhood development specialists into primary care leverages the setting where most infants and toddlers are seen to provide parenting support, screening and connections to other services. This common sense and evidence-based approach is central to ensuring young children, especially from families with fewer resources, reach their developmental milestones and families are connected to key supports. Evidence-based, interdisciplinary pediatric primary care programs promote positive parenting and healthy development for babies and toddlers, particularly in areas where there have been persistent inequities for families with low income and families of color. Beginning in FY2023, the Administration expanded access to early childhood development and screening services in 151 community health centers nationwide. The Administration's FY2024 Budget called for building on this



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Board of Directors

Lee Beers
Abel Covarrubias
Felicia DeHaney
Chandra Ghosh Ippen
Walter S. Gilliam
Mary Margaret Gleason
Brenda Jones Harden
Jon Korfmacher
Tammy Mann
Matthew E. Melmed
Andrew N. Meltzoff
Lisa Mennet
Michelle Meyercord
Catherine Monk
Michael R. Olenick
Joy Osofsky
Helen Raikes
Lauren A. Smith
Paul Spicer
Eugene P. Stein
Barbara Thompson
H. Marcel Wright

Directors Emeriti

Samuel J. Meisels
Kyle D. Pruett
Arnold J. Sameroff
Jack P. Shonkoff

Founding Members

T. Berry Brazelton
Selma Fraiberg
Stanley I. Greenspan
J. Ronald Lally
Bernard Levy
Reginald S. Lourie
Peter B. Neubauer
Robert A. Nover
Sally Provence
Julius B. Richmond
Albert J. Solnit
Leon J. Yarrow

Executive Director

Matthew E. Melmed

initial investment with an additional \$55 million to bring those services to an additional 275 health centers. Adopting this approach in these and other pediatric settings is supported by an investment in the Transforming Pediatrics for Early Childhood (TPEC) at HRSA's Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), which establishes regional hubs and technical assistance to expand the approach.

[ZERO TO THREE asks that the Administration continue prioritizing investments in its FY2025 Budget by including:](#) (1) \$20 million for Early Childhood Development Expert Grants within MCHB, an additional \$10 million, to increase placements of early childhood development experts in pediatric settings with a high percentage of Medicaid and CHIP patients and, (2) an additional \$55 million within the total for HRSA-funded Health Centers to hire or contract for early childhood development specialists to better integrate early developmental promotion and prevention services, as described in the President's FY24 budget request.

Early Care and Education

A [ZERO TO THREE/Morning Consult](#) poll found that nearly 9 in 10 parents of infants and toddlers wanted child care at the top of the legislative agenda. As previously stated, ZERO TO THREE supports the Administration's work to secure emergency funding needed to stabilize child care and secure robust and sustained resources that move our nation closer to funding early care and education as a public good. The President's FY25 budget request should prioritize funding for key early care and education programs that are integral to serving babies and families that require tailored developmental and social supports and services and strengthen core federal child care programs.

Early Head Start (EHS), the only federal program designed to comprehensively address the needs of infants and toddlers living below the federal poverty line and their families, is currently funded to reach just 11 percent of income-eligible infants and toddlers. We urge the Administration to request funding to accomplish both the compensation and quality improvements needed to maintain Head Start/EHS as the gold standard for child care through the rule proposed on November 20, 2023 by the Children and Families Administration – [Supporting the Head Start Workforce and Consistent Quality Programming](#) – as well as directly investing in EHS expansion with a focus on reaching the 25 percent of infants and toddlers who have parents disconnected from the workforce, infants and toddlers who live in deep poverty (50 percent of the federal poverty level), and women and pregnant people – this is consistent with research showing stronger impacts when services began in the prenatal period.

Further, new funding is needed for Part C of IDEA to enable state work to strengthen their systems, including addressing critical workforce needs, and greater integration with early care and education, mental health, and health



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

systems. The RAPID Survey data reported in the *Yearbook* showed that a little more than one-half of families with infants and toddlers have concerns about their child's development, either developmental, behavioral or both. Yet, most babies won't qualify or receive early intervention services, mostly due to a scarcity of resources and lack of capacity. Finally, additional investments in critical federal child care programs are needed to sustain reforms that improve subsidy administration, enhance quality, lower costs for families and better wages and working conditions for early educators.

Board of Directors

Lee Beers
Abel Covarrubias
Felicia DeHaney
Chandra Ghosh Ippen
Walter S. Gilliam
Mary Margaret Gleason
Brenda Jones Harden
Jon Korfmacher
Tammy Mann
Matthew E. Melmed
Andrew N. Meltzoff
Lisa Mennet
Michelle Meyercord
Catherine Monk
Michael R. Olenick
Joy Osofsky
Helen Raikes
Lauren A. Smith
Paul Spicer
Eugene P. Stein
Barbara Thompson
H. Marcel Wright

Directors Emeriti

Samuel J. Meisels
Kyle D. Pruett
Arnold J. Sameroff
Jack P. Shonkoff

Founding Members

T. Berry Brazelton
Selma Fraiberg
Stanley I. Greenspan
J. Ronald Lally
Bernard Levy
Reginald S. Lourie
Peter B. Neubauer
Robert A. Nover
Sally Provence
Julius B. Richmond
Albert J. Solnit
Leon J. Yarrow

Executive Director

Matthew E. Melmed

ZERO TO THREE urges the Administration to prioritize early care and education in the FY2025 Budget by including: (1) \$16 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, doubling the FY23 enacted level, to strengthen the program's ability to support low income families in finding and affording child care and in support of proposed regulatory reforms; (2) at least \$17.47 billion for Head Start, including \$1 billion specifically to expand Early Head Start programs for eligible infants and toddlers and expectant parents, to sustain and support the workforce and improve quality; (3) \$932 million for early intervention services under Part C to boost school readiness and mitigate need for future services for children with disabilities; and (4) at least \$500 million for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) Program which would ensure that roughly 100,000 more parenting college students receive the child care assistance they need to support their advancement and the healthy development of their babies.

In closing, ZERO TO THREE urges you to include these key policies in the FY2025 budget. We would be happy to meet and discuss our recommendations in greater depth. Thank you for all you do to ensure that our nation is a fairer and just place to have and raise a baby.

Sincerely,

Miriam Calderón
Chief Policy Officer
ZERO TO THREE