

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 12, 2007

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
SD-131
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
SD-156
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter:

As Members of the Senate Democratic Hispanic Task Force, we write to you with serious concerns about the proposed elimination of funding for the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program in the Fiscal Year 2008 Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Even Start is one of the only early childhood program offered by the Department of Education that serves children from birth to three years of age, and nearly half (46 percent) of all Even Start families are Hispanic. That is why we are especially concerned that the elimination of the program will leave thousands of Hispanic children and families without access to the essential services they need to ensure school readiness. Regrettably, budget cuts over the past three years have reduced Even Start funding by 60 percent, nearly crippling its ability to serve families. Therefore, we ask that you support the \$99 million provided for Even Start in the House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill in conference.

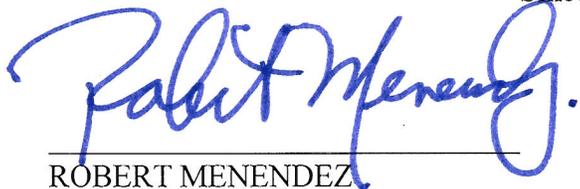
Even Start serves the most vulnerable families in communities across the country. Only 15 percent of families who participate in Even Start have a high school diploma and 41 percent of families reported annual household income of less than \$9,000. The Even Start Program directly addresses many of the educational challenges that families face by providing effective family literacy instruction that enables parents to be active participants in their child's education. The partnering of adult literacy and English as a Second Language instruction with early childhood education services has significantly improved the school readiness of Hispanic children and the literacy rates of their parents.

Unfortunately, efforts to eliminate funding have been based on a flawed study of the Even Start program. States have clearly documented the success of the Even Start Family Literacy Program, particularly with limited-English-proficient (LEP) populations. In Texas, 54

percent of adult Even Start LEP students made significant educational gains, as measured by the adult education national reporting system. In California, Even Start third-grade students outperformed all students on state reading achievement test. These are only a few examples of how the Even Start Family Literacy Program is helping families overcome educational barriers, and we must continue to support programs that have a positive impact in better preparing children and families for academic success.

We cannot continue to deny our communities access to programs that help ensure their social and economic success. We again urge you to support the House appropriated level of \$99 million for the Even Start Family Literacy Program in the final bill.

Sincerely,



ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator
Co-Chair, Hispanic Task Force



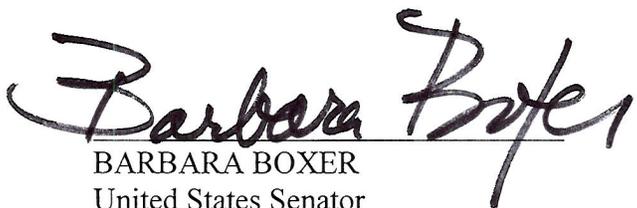
KEN SALAZAR
United States Senator
Co-Chair, Hispanic Task Force



HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
United States Senator



HARRY REID
United States Senator



BARBARA BOXER
United States Senator



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United States Senator