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June 6, 2014

To: Legislative Budget Conference Committee Members

Re: Support for Early Childhood Education Nutrition Investments

Dear Conferees,

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) is writing to urge your support of a state investment in early childhood education (ECE) nutrition. Nutrition reimbursements for ECE programs have the power to boost the nutritional quality of the foods served to California's youngest residents, while simultaneously strengthening the financial viability of California's ECE system.

There is strong scientific evidence that the first five years of life are a critical time for growth and brain development. We know that children who start life with nutritious diets fare better, both physically and academically, and are more likely to thrive later in life. With more than one million children enrolled in California's licensed ECE programs, early educators are uniquely positioned to support a young child's nutritional needs. Unfortunately, three years ago California slashed nutrition-specific funding by 85%, which left ECE programs without adequate resources to provide nutritious foods, particularly those programs serving our most disadvantaged children. As a result, we have seen a decline in nutrition program participation and consequently, decreased access to federal nutrition benefits, and a decrease in the service of fresh fruits and vegetables.

After a decade of budget crises and dire fiscal conditions for the field of ECE, California has finally turned the page. This year the Legislature has the opportunity to put forth a budget that will begin to rebuild our state's ECE system; to do so your budget must include the Assembly's proposed investment in early childhood nutrition (K-12 Conference Committee Agenda Page 8). The Assembly's proposed investment is a conservative, yet impactful approach to investing in ECE nutrition. As you've heard from many ECE advocates, a well-functioning ECE system needs a combination of available slots, adequate provider rates, and high quality care. The Assembly's proposed ECE nutrition investment contributes to all three of these components by supporting the financial viability of the provider and by incentivizing participation in the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program – a

nutrition program that research shows results in improved nutrition *and* higher quality of care. In addition, this proposal ensures that these state dollars would be prioritized for low-income children. In fact, the Assembly's proposed investment would support the provision of over 73 million nutritious meals each year to more than 500,000 low-income children.

Including this investment in your final budget is a clear opportunity to act upon the Legislature's commitment to restoring California's ECE system. Our youngest children need and deserve a healthy, well-nourished start to life.

Please contact Elyse Homel Vitale at elyse@cfpa.net or 510.433.1122 ext. 206 with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Elyse Homel Vitale, MPH
Nutrition Policy Advocate

cc: The California Legislative Women's Caucus (CLWC) Members
The Honorable Toni Atkins, Speaker of the California State Assembly
The Honorable Darrell Steinberg, President pro Tem of the California State Senate