

[Date]

The Honorable [Name of Senator]

United States Senate

[Office Number] Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [Name of Senator]:

[Name of Church or Christian School], which is a member of the Old Dominion Association of Church Schools, urges you to oppose S. 1380, the ***Strong Start for America's Children Act of 2015***. Though early education can certainly be beneficial to many students, involvement of the federal government in early education will prove costly, cumbersome, and counterproductive. Proposals such as the Administration's *Preschool for All* initiative further expand federal influence in and control of education, which in turn serves to erode personal and community responsibility. Additionally, increased federal control will undermine academic freedom, states' rights, parental rights, and potentially the rights of faith-based organizations that already provide excellent preschool opportunities. Such an expansive federal role is inappropriate in a free society.

The *Preschool for All* initiative gives states incentives to implement additional regulations for pre-schools in the areas of teacher certification, curriculum, and assessment systems. Only two results of expanded regulation are certain: higher costs and fewer options for parents. Decades of federal intervention in early education, like the Head Start program, have produced little if any long-term benefit to students. Despite the failure of federal preschool spending to deliver on its promises, and despite the specious nature of research that is often cited in support of increased federal involvement, the current administration is seeking to dramatically increase its influence over and control of America's preschools.

Many ODACS schools offer pre-kindergarten classes; we recognize the value that such programs can have for some families. We also understand the importance that child safety plays in the early childcare discussion. **There is much data to support the conclusion that the safest preschools are religious exempt centers;** they are safer than other unlicensed private centers and than licensed centers! For instance, in one recent year in Virginia (2013-2014), DSS data reveals that there were 46 founded cases of child abuse in Virginia's licensed centers, compared to only 1 founded case in religious exempt centers! Additionally, for licensed centers during that same year, 21.2% of all reported cases were founded, compared to only 5.9% for religious exempt centers! During recent public discussion about instances of child mortality in preschool settings, there has been a widely publicized comparison between licensed centers and unlicensed private centers; however, there is conspicuous silence regarding the mortality data with respect to religious exempt centers.

Religious exempt preschools in Virginia are sufficiently regulated by the state. We believe that further regulation originating at either the federal level or the state level will have the unintended consequence of placing many children in licensed settings where they will be less safe than they currently are in their religious exempt centers!

Finally, the expansion of power that the federal government seeks contradicts the self-evident principle that parents, not government, have the primary God-given right and responsibility to oversee the upbringing of children. *Preschool for All* and the *Child Care and Development Block Grant* represent a serious threat to the rights of parents to rear their young children as they see fit. We urge you to join with us in opposing this overreach of federal power. Thank you for your service in the Congress and for considering our opinion.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]