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November 14, 2019

The Honorable James Risch
Chairman
Foreign Relations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bob Menendez
Ranking Member
Foreign Relations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Eliot Engel
Chairman
Foreign Affairs Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Michael McCaul
Ranking Member
Foreign Affairs Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Risch, Senator Menendez, Representative Engel and Representative McCaul,

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and President and CEO of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), we write in support of the Global Child Thrive Act (S-2715 and HR-4864) introduced by Senators Roy Blunt and Chris Coons and Representatives Joaquin Castro and Brian Fitzpatrick. **This bipartisan and bicameral piece of legislation mandates that the United States integrate Early Childhood Development (ECD) into our current foreign assistance programs serving young children and their families.** ECD interventions include training caregivers to provide age-appropriate mental stimulation and nurturing care such as singing and reading, playing with colorful objects and shapes, and responsive interaction.

We raise this critical issue with you because we believe that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the basis of a moral society. A basic moral test for society is how our most vulnerable members are faring. An astounding 250 million children worldwide are at risk of stunted brains due to the negative impacts of poverty. Poor health, nutrition, inadequate learning, and exposure to conflict and displacement impair vulnerable children's optimal development. The good news is that high quality interventions delivered early can mitigate the impact of these factors.

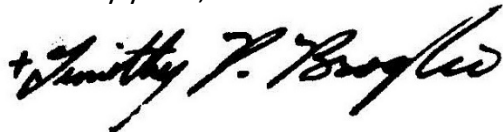
ECD can make a world of difference for a child and for his or her country. Studies show that investment in quality ECD programs can produce a [13% return](#) on investment per year by improving health outcomes, boosting salaries, improving the economy, and reducing a country's deficit. A 20-year study of children in Jamaica showed that Early Childhood Development interventions for children zero to three years of age [increased their future earnings by 25 percent](#).

Over the past four years, Catholic Relief Services has been providing ECD assistance to over 1.36 million children and their families in 20 countries worldwide. Our work focuses on the most vulnerable children, helping their families ensure they reach school age, are healthy and well-nourished, intellectually curious, socially confident, and equipped with a solid foundation for life-long learning. Both the USCCB and CRS believe that this wholistic approach is critical to protecting the most vulnerable people in our world, young children, and thus one effective way to put our faith into action.

Cost-effective, strategic interventions, such as ECD, made during a child's early years, can mitigate and often overcome the negative impact of poverty, toxic stress and poor nutrition. Building the brain architecture of the youngest and most vulnerable in our human family ultimately will result in long-lasting gains that reap benefits, not only for the children themselves, but for their families, communities, and nations. In doing so, it will also make the most effective and impactful use of our foreign aid funding dollars.

For these reasons we urge you to move these bills to the floor of your respective chambers. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely yours,



The Most Reverend Timothy P. Broglio
Archbishop for the Military Services, USA
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Mr. Sean Callahan
President and CEO
Catholic Relief Services