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May 10, 2019

The Honorable Jay Costa
Senate Box 203043
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3043

Dear Senator Costa:

On behalf of the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, we are writing to request your help in preserving vital services for Allegheny County's most vulnerable families.

For 27 years, the AIU has efficiently operated family centers that provide evidence-based home-visiting services in economically distressed communities: currently, the City of Pittsburgh (Hazelwood), Clairton City, Duquesne City, Homestead, McKeesport, McKees Rocks, Penn Hills, Tarentum, Wilkinsburg and Wilmerding. In these areas, large percentages of families live at or near the federal poverty level, and most students participate in free and reduced-price lunch programs.

The AIU receives about half of the funding for its family centers from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) and its Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), through the Allegheny County Department of Human Services. On May 2, 2019, DHS and OCDEL issued a Request for Applications for Family Support Programs – Family Centers (RFA 23-18) that abruptly and drastically changes family center funding, effective July 1, 2019. The RFA limits funding for each county to two applicants and a maximum of \$561,200. These unprecedented limitations mean that the AIU, if selected as a family center operator, would lose at least \$1.3 million in funding.

This significant reduction in investment will have an immediate and severe impact upon the families we serve – more than 1,000 families and 1,900 children this year alone. Our family centers strengthen families by providing crucial resources and services to those with children from before birth to age 5. On a daily basis, our staff promotes healthy childhood development; increases parental knowledge and encourages best practices; supports the early detection of developmental delays; identifies potential health issues; and prepares children to succeed in school. In addition, our centers address families' many needs such as those associated with food insecurity, lack of clothing, infant and child essentials, mental health and substance abuse. If DHS and OCDEL proceed with the RFA, the AIU will be forced to close multiple family centers while slashing staff and services supporting families at the remaining sites – all within the next two months.

We maximize educational opportunities for all learners by responding to the needs of our community with leading-edge, high-quality, cost-effective programs and services.

The AIU's family centers have achieved these quantifiable outcomes, among others:

- 98% of children have enrolled in kindergarten on time with educational supports in place.
- 95% of enrolled families have health insurance.
- 94% of children have up-to-date immunizations.
- 90% of pregnant mothers receive prenatal care.
- 60% of families have gained employment, attained a better job or enrolled in a post-secondary education program.

Enclosed with this letter are examples of our family centers' successes stories. These brief narratives provide insight into the real work we do every day.

In many impoverished communities, the family center is the sole point of access to resources and supports. Our centers are places where families can feel safe and access basic needs – the very things that many of us take for granted.

For all these reasons, we urge you to request that DHS and OCDEL rescind RFA 23-18 and continue their current provider contracts so that our families and children are not denied the support they so clearly need. Should the RFA proceed, we ask that you advocate for appropriations in the 2019-2020 state budget to maintain current funding for Allegheny County's family centers. Please do not hesitate to contact any of us to discuss this matter. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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Enclosure