

## **SAMPLE OP-ED**

### **Be Careful What You Cut**

During these volatile and politically polarizing times, we hear political candidates make all sorts of promises. Promises to jump start the economy and to cut the deficit. Promises to help the middle class, and cut taxes for the wealthiest Americans and the richest corporations. It's long past time to hear our candidates make and keep promises to protect our voiceless, voteless children from budget cuts.

With a record 16.4 million children poor in America, and 7.4 million living in extreme poverty, there is no denying our country needs to get its budget priorities straight. Children under five are the poorest age group in America and one in four infants, toddlers and preschoolers are poor during the years of greatest brain development. Shockingly, only three percent of eligible infants and toddlers are served by Early Head Start due to limited funding. Without high-quality early childhood intervention, an at-risk child is 25 percent more likely to drop out of school. But too many of us don't understand the long-term budget implications of cutting programs that move vulnerable children to productive lives.

Did you know that eliminating early education investments now increases the chance a boy will go to prison later by 39 percent? Paying for that prison will cost us nearly three times more each year than it would have cost to provide him with a quality early learning experience.

The cradle to prison pipeline crisis leaves a Black boy born in 2001 with a one-in-three chance of going to prison in his lifetime and a Latino boy a one-in-six risk of the same fate. The pipeline is fueled by pervasive poverty, racial disparities, inadequate physical and mental health care, gaps in early childhood development, disparate educational opportunities, chronic abuse and neglect, and overburdened and ineffective juvenile justice systems. To replace the cradle to prison pipeline with a pipeline to college and productive work, our political leaders at all levels must invest in children, protect them from budget cuts, and ensure that the wealthiest Americans help by paying their fair share.

Children need our help early and they need it now. All children in America deserve a healthy, safe and fair start in life. Our children's future and America's future depend on it. All adults who care about children and who care about our country should be able to agree this not only makes economic sense, it's the right thing to do. During this political year, use your vote for children. It's a simple calculation, really. Protect now or pay later.