First 5 LA supports the Strong Start for America’s Children Act of 2013 (H.R. 3461/S. 1697). This bipartisan legislation would ensure that all young children in our nation have access to high-quality early care and education programs. This is a matter not only of equity—low-income children are far more likely to lack access to quality care—but of our nation’s economic growth and competitiveness in the global economy. A nation that invests in all children from the start will be stronger, healthier, and more productive.

Early childhood education is increasingly viewed as a critical component of an overall quality education and is arguably the smartest investment any society can make. Participation in quality early care and education programs among low-income students has, in fact, resulted in stronger reading and math skills in elementary school than for similar students who never attended such programs. Studies have also pointed to higher graduation rates, lower remediation rates, and ultimately a reduction in long term negative outcomes like unemployment and crime among those who participated in quality early education programs.

Introduced by Representatives George Miller (D-CA), the ranking member of the Education and the Workforce Committee and Richard Hanna (R-NY), the Strong Start for America’s Children Act would create a state-federal partnership that provides early education to our nation’s youngest learners. If enacted, this law would give 4-year olds at 200 percent of the poverty level or below the opportunity to attend high quality preschool. Currently, Head Start serves a smaller portion of the low-income population, as poverty thresholds for participation are at or below 100 percent of the poverty level. This expanded eligibility would result in 40,857 children from low- and moderate-income families in the first year of the program alone potentially enrolling in quality programs in California. In Los Angeles County, the need to increase child care and development services is great: currently for every 100 children ages birth to 5 in L.A. County, there are only 22 licensed early learning spaces.

This legislation would also significantly expand much needed infant and toddler care, as states can spend up to 15 percent of their funding on programs targeting infants. In California, according to a 2012 Rand study, a meager 8 percent of infants and toddlers whose families qualify for child care assistance are served by subsidized programs. In addition, States can use up to 20 percent of their funds for improving the quality of programs.

We recognize that we must make smart investments with our limited resources to strengthen our state and our nation, and with the enactment of this legislation we know that we are moving in the right direction.