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WASHINGTON, DC -- U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee.

In May of last year, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and I along with our colleagues, Congresswoman DeLauro and Congressman Fattah, co-chaired the very first National Summit on America's Children. During the day-long discussion, we and many Members of Congress heard from a very distinguished panel of scientists and practitioners. They presented findings based on complex research and analysis and on years of experience working with families and communities. The premise of the day's summit was simple: Focusing on children, particularly at an early age, is not only the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do for our country and our economy.

Seven children's advocates from Contra Costa and Solano Counties came to the conference. Each one works within a local agency that represents an aspect of a young child's life: health and mental health, early learning, child care, and basic family economics. Together as a group they found the information presented so compelling that they have created a local summit - an opportunity to share with each of you the data that supports the contention that *Investing in Young Children Is Good Public Policy*.

Compelling new research on early childhood and brain development concludes that the first years of life have a much greater and lasting impact on children's future growth than we previously understood. With science telling us that early childhood experiences influence the very architecture and chemistry of a developing brain, it would be profoundly irresponsible for us as policymakers not to take this science and integrate it into everything we do.

That's why we convened the conference in Washington – as a first step in a new partnership among policymakers, scientists, and practitioners to work together to make sure that policies are based in sound science and are good for children, good for families, and good for this country.

We have a strong moral obligation to make sure that all children in America have the support they need to thrive and we can use our accumulated knowledge to make the case that smarter policies and greater investments in early childhood will, in the long run, benefit all Americans, young and old.

A dollar spent on a child's future is a dollar invested, not a dollar consumed. That's because, as you know so well, fully nurturing, educating, and supporting young children reaps dramatic benefits as they grow up. Indeed, different studies on early childhood education have found that spending \$1 today can produce savings much greater than that. These investments can make our economy stronger and more competitive.

Unfortunately, our country has been slow to recognize and address the needs of our youngest citizens, perhaps because, until recently, clear scientific evidence about brain development and early childhood was lacking.

Only 20 years ago, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was advising Head Start centers not to display letters of the alphabet on the classroom walls. Today, we know children's brains are like sponges, wired and eager to learn, and that literature-rich environments are one key component of cognitive growth. Neuroscience can now also demonstrate that cognitive growth happens in concert with social and emotional development. But there remain many ways in which our policies neglect the basic needs of our youngest children.

Sixty percent of children under age six spend significant time in child care settings. Yet there is a severe shortage of affordable high-quality child care in this country. As a result, families must struggle to find good care.

Comprehensive early childhood programs lead to better cognitive growth, improved behavior, stronger parenting, and better health for low income children, yet funding for Early Head Start has grown slowly since its inception in 1994 and only reaches 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers.

And providing early learning services for children with developmental delays reduces the need for special education services in elementary school. But as a nation, we have yet to prioritize early identification and do not adequately support parents in their efforts to help their children.

I urge you to join in the conversation. The 2008 Children Summit will mark the start of a meaningful dialogue about how we can update our local social and economic policies to reflect the science of early childhood. We must examine how best to craft science-based legislation that can support the developing brains and needs of young children. Supporting and investing in young children is not only the right thing to do – it is the necessary thing to do if America wants to remain competitive in the global economy.