

October 27, 2010

The Honorable Christine Gregoire  
Office of the Governor  
P. O. Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Governor Gregoire,

We are writing as members of America's Edge, a nonprofit organization of business leaders in Washington State who work to strengthen businesses and the economy through proven investments in children.

High-quality early learning programs will spur economic development today when Washington needs it most. Research confirms that early learning investments will generate as much or more sales of local goods and services than investments in other economic sectors, including manufacturing, transportation, and retail and wholesale trade. These investments will also create jobs, increase workforce productivity, and help attract the skilled employees we will need in Washington as our state economy recovers.

In the long-term, investments in quality early learning have a return on investment that is unmatched by almost any other public investment – as much as \$16 for every \$1 invested. These programs will ensure a highly-skilled future workforce by increasing a child's preparedness to enter and succeed in school as well as increasing graduation rates and the earnings of these children when they are adults.

Kindergarten teachers across Washington report that 75 percent of children from low-income households are not prepared to enter kindergarten. Research shows poverty and low-income levels are risk factors that put our young children's well-being and learning outcomes at risk. High-quality early learning experiences and programs will help these children develop reading, writing, and math skills, as well as the ability to become good communicators, collaborators and critical-thinkers – skills that are so important to success in school and the workplace.

When children arrive at kindergarten without a solid foundation in these skills, taxpayers bear the high cost of remedial education, which is hard on kids and schools. And when these children eventually enter the workforce, their lack of basic skills, such as math, literacy and other core competencies, costs the nation \$3.7 billion annually in remedial education services and lost wages according to a report from the Alliance for Excellent Education. Investments in quality early learning programs are a proven way to reduce this unsustainable cost.

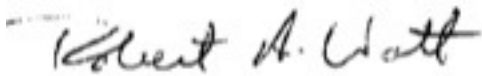
Despite these proven benefits, the unmet need for high-quality early learning is enormous and

growing. The waiting list for the **Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)** for low-income 3- and 4-year-olds has grown by over 250% in the past 18 months. This increase has been driven by two factors: the growing number of families falling into poverty; and funding cuts in the last two years. The most recent across-the-board budget cuts you requested have resulted in a proposed reduction to ECEAP funding by another \$920,000 in the current fiscal year.

We recognize the continuing, unprecedented challenge you face in balancing our state budget and value the work you have done on behalf of children and families. We also know that we absolutely must not allow any further erosion of our state's investment in ECEAP. Every child who is denied access to this program represents a lost opportunity to strengthen our public schools and businesses, contribute to our state's economic recovery, and maintain our competitive edge in a global marketplace.

**We hope we can count on you to work to protect ECEAP from any further budget cuts.**  
Thank you for your work on behalf of all Washington residents.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Watt  
Vice President (Ret.), The Boeing Company



Mike Edwards  
Director, Thurston First Bank



George Le Masurier  
Publisher, The Olympian



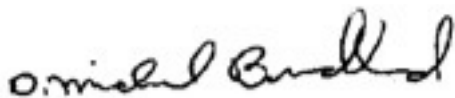
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President, Approach Management Services  
President, WA State Association of Hispanic  
Chambers of Commerce



James M. Will  
President, Titus-Will Auto Group



Michael Cade  
Executive Director, Thurston Economic  
Development Council



D. Michael Broadhead  
President, Central Valley Bank



Medrice Coluccio  
Chief Executive, Providence St. Peter Hospital



Mary Anstensen  
Vice President, Construction Unlimited, Inc.



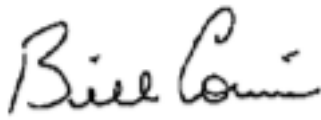
Patrick J. Beehler  
Director of Survey, WH Pacific



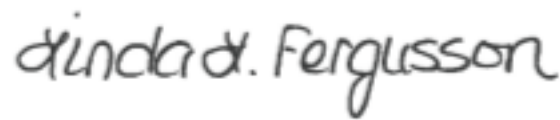
Sue Christianson  
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CEO, Skagit Valley Hospital & Regional Clinics



Bill Cowin  
President, Ketchikan Drywall Services



Linda Fergusson  
President/CEO, Burlington Chamber of Commerce



Lori Drummond  
President/CEO, Olympia Federal Savings



David M. Hargreaves  
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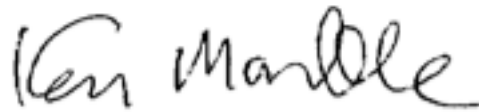
Mitch Everton  
Member, Anacortes School Board



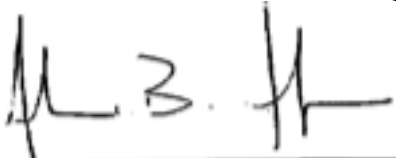
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Refinery Manager, Shell Oil Company



Charlie Guildner  
Executive VP/Chief Credit, Peoples Bank



Ken Marble  
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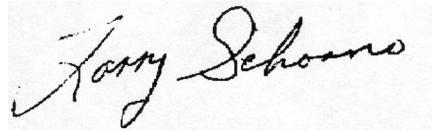
Alex B. Hodge  
Senior VP, Banner Bank



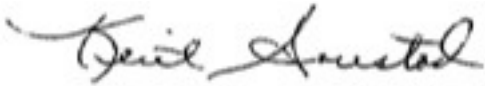
David McFadden  
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Larry Schorno  
Owner, Schorno Agri-Business



Keith Sorestad  
Agent-Owner, State Farm Insurance



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Port of Skagit

Copies to: Marty Brown  
Dr. Bette Hyde