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To: Power to the Profession Task Force

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RE: Statement from the CUPID Collaborative

We are members of the Collaborative for the Understanding of the Pedagogy of Infant/toddler Development (CUPID), a group of 50 scholars from 25 universities across the country. We are studying how we teach courses on infant/toddler development, what our students are learning, and which students select careers in early care and education. As such, we are deeply committed to the issues being addressed by the Power to the Profession Initiative. We thank you for the opportunity to express our opinions and comment on the initiative's process and work to date. Our goal is to address three issues in this letter. First, we state why we believe that infant/toddler care and education is a specialization with its own core knowledge and skills. Second, we address why higher education is important to developing and maintaining knowledge and skills, as well as what supports are needed to maintain and grow knowledge and skills, and finally, we conclude with specific policy recommendations around training and skill requirements for practice.

1) Infant toddler care and education is a specialization with its own core knowledge and skills

The unique period of human development between birth and age 3 is characterized by rapid development of foundational skills and vulnerability to the myriad influences of the immediate environment (most importantly adult-child interactions). This requires practitioners working with these youngest children to have specialized knowledge and skills.

- Core knowledge essential and unique to this age period includes (but is not limited to) the parent-child attachment paradigm and behaviors related to development of secure attachment; influences on behavior and development including temperament, attachment, and the immediate environment; early signs of developmental delays and disorders that should be addressed through intervention during the first three years.
- Skills needed by practitioners working with infants and toddlers, unique to this age period, include practicing developmentally appropriate and supportive care routines; coordinating and individualizing learning opportunities and daily routines to support development across domains for each baby, while making classroom opportunities relevant to all babies in the group who will present a range of developmental skills; observing and assessing behavior and development of preverbal children across domains, screening for developmental delays and disorders; and implementing daily, systematic, family-centered communication about babies' experiences, behavior, and development.

2) Higher education is essential in developing knowledge and skills and continued support is necessary to maintain knowledge and skills and allow practitioners to stay abreast of new information

Supporting infant and toddler development in a comprehensive way requires high-level skills developed at the Bachelor's or Master's levels. Infants and toddlers need practitioners who have the core interaction skills uniquely relevant to the infant-toddler period (e.g., those identified in the Zero To Three core competencies: form a positive relationship with each baby, be responsive to children's social and emotional cues, guide children's behavior in a positive way, and scaffold exploration and learning.

As well, practitioners working with infants and toddlers must have a broader set of skills that enable them to: (a) be reflective, self-driven professionals who are joyful in their interactions, satisfied with their work, and continually learning based on their own goals; (b) form and maintain goal-oriented positive relationships with families to support babies' development; (c) systematically and intentionally plan individualized supports for babies' development and learning based on observations; (d) screen and assess babies' development, referring families for additional services when needed; and (e) work intentionally and competently with babies with special needs to support their development, including working as part of multi-disciplinary teams.

Supporting infant and toddler development and well-being requires practitioners who are trained, supported, respected, paid well, and retained. The biggest influence on development is the quality of the everyday interactions babies have with their caregivers (parents and early educators). The strongest influences on the qualities of these interactions include educators' training, but also their mental health, stress levels, energy levels, and how well they know the babies in their care. Retention is crucial for continuity of care, and paying a living wage, with appropriate health care and benefits, is necessary to retain infant/toddler educators, as well as ensure their health and wellbeing.

3) Specific policy recommendations

- **Requirements for Training:** A competencies framework is crucial for development of the workforce when there are few and scattered resources / opportunities for training and professional development as is the case currently. Assessing and verifying competencies will also be a crucial bridge between promoting professional development for the existing workforce whose members have more experience than education, and the future workforce whose members will have greater opportunities for pre-service education.
- **Requirements for Training:** Infant/toddler education should be a specialty, with higher education training available at the Associate and Bachelor's levels. Specialization at the Bachelor's level could be integrated into a general Early Childhood Education and/or Child Development degree, but with a minimum number of infant-toddler specific credits, and field-based experience hours). Institutes of Higher Education will need guidance on the content of the Associates'- and Bachelor's-level infant/toddler specializations, which should include a minimum amount of infant-toddler specific content, intended to build infant-toddler specific competencies as well as general ECE competencies, and must include field-based experiences (e.g., practica, internships) with infants and toddlers and their families.
- **Requirements for Practice—Center-Based:** Infant/toddler classrooms should have at least one Bachelor's-level Lead Educator with broad skills in infant/toddler care and education, as well as skills in mentoring/supervising adults and building relationships with families. Assistant Educators in an infant/toddler classroom must (a) be supervised by a lead teacher with Bachelor's-level training; (b) have a minimum level of training (e.g., Associate's degree) specifically on infant/toddler development, care, guidance, education; and (c) demonstrate competencies in positive, responsive, child-led interactions. (This model is used in government-funded child care centers in Chile.) This model will also create a clear career path for infant/toddler educators, as they can move from Assistant to Lead Educator.
- **Requirements for Practice—Home-Based:** Home-based infant/toddler care and education providers (a) should have at least Associate's level training in infant-toddler development, care, and education, and (b) must demonstrate the same competencies as Assistant Educators in

center-based settings, and (c) must be supervised by Infant-Toddler Specialists (Bachelor's or Master's level) who can provide support for broader aspects of practice.