



December 11, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of nearly 1,600 Head Start and Early Head Start programs faithfully delivering high-quality, science-based early childhood education and family support services even in the face of COVID-19, I write to express concern that the next round of federal COVID-19 supplemental funding appears to exclude critical resources for Head Start and Early Head Start programs. In no uncertain terms, this will have a chilling effect on the ability of programs to meet the basic needs of children—nutrition, critical health screenings and assessments, early learning, and emotional support. While praiseworthy efforts have been made to address the gaping hole in child care, pointedly, this funding does not equate to Head Start funding.

As you likely know, Head Start serves our nation's most vulnerable—those experiencing homelessness, in foster care, and living in poverty, all of whom now face even greater challenges amidst this pandemic. In the midst of the storm that is the COVID-19 pandemic, Head Start serves as a refuge, offering safety and security to these children and stability to caregivers.

Quite literally, Head Start programs—from remote communities in Alaska to south Florida and everywhere in between—have been the sole stabilizing outreach and support to isolated children and to shut-in, high-risk factor families. In so many communities, Head Start has been the only knock at the door, the only consistent call, and the only safe, trusted place to leave a

child while a mom or dad headed off to work, mask on. Mere statistics fail to truly show the hardships facing Head Start families, ranging from homelessness and joblessness to food insecurity and lack of access to basic healthcare. Unfortunately, the strains of COVID-19 will be felt most acutely by these families—the families and children Head Start is so proud to stand with and serve.

With great foresight, Congress provided an initial infusion of funding to support Head Start through the CARES Act. Programs are grateful, and many would be teetering on the brink without it. Following the initial wave of school shutdowns and closures, because of this critical investment, many programs were able to pivot to online and virtual programming, purchase initial tranches of PPE and, most notably, continue modified operations, hold summer sessions, and develop mitigation strategies to ensure families were not abandoned. Head Start never shut down.

Instead, Head Start staff leaned forward: they undertook facility upgrades to provide for distancing, instituted double sessions and asynchronous learning to reduce risk, put together online programs, donned PPE and made vital house calls, and instituted significant health and safety procedural changes—all to stay connected and keep the learning going. In most instances, programs reopened for in-person services, and where conditions did not allow it, continued distance-learning and hybrid options. There are poignant success stories in every state and every district.

These heroic efforts were subsequently lauded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in a December 7, 2020 report citing Head Start as a model for successful implementation of in-person services that mitigated risk of spread by following CDC guidelines:

Head Start and Early Head Start programs successfully implemented CDC-recommended guidance and other ancillary measures for child care programs that remained open, allowing them to continue offering in-person learning. These approaches were documented to guide implementation of mitigation strategies in child care settings...These approaches could be applied to other early care and education settings that remain open for in-person learning and potentially reduce the spread of coronavirus disease 2019.

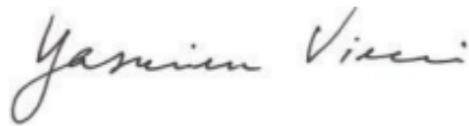
Congress should not be backing down from Head Start funding; it should be doubling down—doubling down on a proven, established whole-person and whole-family program that is executing safe, complex COVID-19 mitigation strategies to ensure our country's most at-risk children are not overlooked and overwhelmed amidst this pandemic. Congress should be

doubling down on trusted, tireless educators, staff, and volunteers who are dedicating countless hours to ensure the health and welfare of children. Congress should be doubling down on accountable programs that must meet and exceed performance criteria and uphold the highest health, safety, and educational standards. Congress should be investing in Head Start.

Several legislators have weighed in this year in support of \$1.7 billion, specific to an identified Head Start funding need. Through an exhaustive survey, programs large and small, urban and rural have identified the costs of combating COVID-19 as totalling roughly 20% above and beyond regular operational costs. While I believe programs have made wise and cost conscious decisions, the reality is that the costs of COVID-19 will be borne in the months ahead, and frankly, the aftermath of COVID-19 will be just as challenging.

I urge you to find a compromise that includes Head Start. I urge you to speak with Head Start program directors, parents, and educators in your state to appreciate their herculean efforts and the significant level of need. Thank you for your consideration of our urgent needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Yasmina Vinci".

Yasmina Vinci
Executive Director

CC:

Members of U.S. House of Representatives
Members of U.S. Senate