



Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

May 22, 2023

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
H 307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As the House Appropriations Committee moves toward consideration of FY24 bills based on what is reportedly a substantially lower non-defense discretionary funding level, I want to make sure that you are aware that level funding or “modest reductions” to Head Start and Early Head Start will cause severe, irreparable harm to early childhood education and underserved children across the country.

Without a doubt, any reductions will result in cuts to the number of children served, will further exacerbate a critical shortage of early learning professionals, and will ultimately close centers and classrooms, including in areas where early learning programs are already virtually non-existent. Even programs like Child Care Associates in Fort Worth, Texas, and LULAC Head Start in New Haven, Connecticut, have informed me that they will be forced to cut access to Head Start and Early Head Start.

Some in Congress have suggested that federal programs can simply absorb a “modest” 22% reduction in funding. That is by no means the case with Head Start. Right now, Head Start programs have trouble paying qualified staff a living wage and cannot compete with rising private sector and public school salaries and benefits. In addition, Head Start programs must maintain strict federal student-teacher ratios, making them uniquely labor intensive. Elimination of even one teacher position may force the closing of a classroom. This is on top of the severe emotional and psychological trauma children in many communities have suffered from the scourge of opioids, upheaval of COVID-19, and seemingly nonstop environmental and migration disasters.

In Fort Worth, for example, a 22% cut would force Child Care Associates to reduce its staff by at least 20%, leading to the closure of six sites. This means that over 70 employees would lose their jobs and over 300 children and their families would lose access to Head Start services. Depending on which locations would have to be closed, this could have a disproportionately major impact on some of the smaller towns within Tarrant County. In addition, the City of Fort Worth and Tarrant County are investing over \$30 million in new facilities and renovations to

expand infant-toddler classrooms for Early Head Start. Losing any funding would be a major blow and could leave brand new buildings empty.

In New Haven, the impact of a 22% reduction in funding on LULAC Head Start would include closing two-to-three classrooms, a devastating outcome when the program already has a waiting list of 178 children. The program expects that they would have to cut many employees back to only six hours per day which would lead to more staff vacancies and even more classroom closures. Reduced funding will also force cuts in mental health support services and contracts for the children and families at a time when trauma and children's special needs are significantly increasing.

Without access to Head Start for their children, more workers – including critical day laborers – will be forced to leave the workforce and more children will be at risk of exposure to precarious living conditions without getting basic educational and health and wellness care. This will lead to less desirable early learning outcomes, fewer taxpayers, unfinished high school and college degrees, and reduced community child care options.

All of this points to doubling down on funding Head Start, not an ill-advised, illogical retreat. To reverse the unfortunate situation, we urge you to prioritize investing in Head Start and not cutting it as your communities continue to rebound from the devastation of the last three years. NHSA recommends total Head Start funding to increase to \$16.5 billion, in order to:

- stop the siphoning off of credentialed staff to public education;
- help programs address the mounting challenges of mental and physical health and bolster teaching programs in Native American and tribal communities;
- provide teachers and staff with additional tools to address the mounting classroom behavior challenges; and
- ultimately, reaffirm that our greatest asset is the children we serve.

I urge you, in your unique leadership positions, to fundamentally shift the conversation from cutting critical programs to impactful investing in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yasmina Vinci". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Yasmina Vinci
Executive Director

cc: Members of the House Appropriations Committee