



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

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January 8, 2024

The Honorable Kay Granger  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-307 The Capitol  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray  
U.S. Senate  
S-128 The Capitol  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1036 Longworth House Office Building  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins  
U.S. Senate  
S-146 The Capitol  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairwoman Granger, Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Ranking Member Collins:

On behalf of over 16,200 Head Start and Early Head Start programs nationwide that provide critical, early childhood learning opportunities in urban, tribal, and rural child care centers across the United States, the time to work together is now. I urge you to resolve differences in FY24 discretionary spending in order to prioritize the very real needs of Head Start programs, primarily in staff recruitment and retention as well as the desperate need for a cost-of-living adjustment in keeping with inflation.

I know early childhood education staffing issues—made worse in the past few years by rising inflation, COVID-19 chaos, worsening workplace conditions, and increased compensation for elementary education teachers—are known to you and your Committees. Fortunately, the Committees have been responsive and attentive year-over-year, in large part due to your collective leadership. Now the 118th Congress needs your cooperative, collegial, and resilient leadership like never before.

The President's FY24 budget request went a long way in specifically seeking \$574.5 million to address the growing compensation gap between equivalently credentialed elementary educators and Head Start teachers. The National Head Start Association (NHSA) and our partners remain convinced that the constant siphoning off staff to the public school system or to better paying service sector jobs, weakens the strength of Head Start programs. It also creates unnecessary uncertainty for parents and program managers who are trying to build community trust and move families from surviving to thriving.

Over the past few years, Congress has invested in addressing trauma needs for children, families, and staff, but it is of little value if we lose our people. Head Start programs are consistently and persistently pressing the House and Senate authorizing committees and the White House to make structural changes to address this “brain drain” but ultimately we need your help.



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Second, and even more critical, is the need for a sustained, cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). This investment allows Head Start programs to keep classrooms open by helping entice teachers to stay, even as they see rent, fuel, and food costs climb. NHTSA recommends a COLA of \$372 million for FY24, in keeping with the current inflation rate of 3.2%.

NHTSA and our partners know all too well the divergent views on “side deals” and the very real challenges of budget deficits. We’re also acutely aware and confronted daily with the hollowing out of our communities—large and small—that occurs when there are inadequate learning and care opportunities for children. We’re also aware that the gap between rich and poor continues to widen and believe (and the facts prove it out) that Head Start provides a bridge to so many who desire to move out of poverty and into a prosperous, healthy life.

When Tiffany McGary Cyprian had her first child at 16 years old, she did not know where to turn. Young parents face a mountain of challenges from finding child care to continue school or work opportunities to simply learning how to be a parent. When Tiffany found her Early Head Start program in Robert, Louisiana, the Regina Coeli Child Development Center (RCCDC), everything felt possible. With the help of RCCDC, Tiffany, like so many other young parents, was able to not only finish her degree but also graduated at the top of her class and built a career as a registered nurse. Tiffany’s story is reflected across Louisiana as 11,085 program parents are employed, in school, or in job training.

Tiffany is just one of nearly 40 million Head Start alumni whose testimonies are living proof points of Head Start’s ongoing positive impact on society. With that in mind, cuts to Head Start can not and must not happen on your watch.

I plead with you to lean forward for those in your community who depend on your leadership for their life and their future.

Sincerely,

Yasmina S. Vinci  
Executive Director, National Head Start Association

cc: House Appropriations Committee Members  
Senate Appropriations Committee Members