

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 19, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, and Education
2368-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, and
Education
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As you consider Fiscal Year 2022 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations legislation, we urge you to prioritize funding for Head Start. Specifically, we request at least \$12.1 billion for Head Start in FY 2022, a \$1.3 billion increase over FY 2021 enacted. This increase in funding will support a cost-of-living adjustment, add quality improvement funds (QIF) to combat rising mental health and childhood trauma challenges, and expanded program hours of service consistent with the 2016 Head Start Program Performance Standards.

As you know, Head Start and Early Head Start programs offer education, health, and nutrition services to children from at-risk backgrounds—those living in poverty, in foster care, or experiencing homelessness—as well as employment and educational support to their parents. Increased funding for Head Start is a wise, cost-effective investment in families and local communities that ultimately leads to greater prosperity for future generations. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that high-quality early childhood education programs generate a significant return on investment, and that the advantages of Head Start can last a lifetime.

Over the past few months, we have seen a remarkable level of effort from dedicated Head Start staff to maintain quality programming; support in-home and in-person early education; modify classrooms and procedures to create safe learning environments; and provide rigorous sanitation and screening to protect children, workers, and families during the pandemic. Head Start programs have proven to be resilient, and as children and families stabilize and build trajectories toward success, we must invest in Head Start's proven, crisis-tested work.

In FY 2022, Head Start will strain to retain qualified staff as programs struggle to pay competitive wages, meet minimum wage requirements, or match the benefits provided by comparable jobs. Without adjusted funds, the realities of our competitive economy will require programs to choose between cutting access for children or underpaying and losing staff. The FY 2022 request includes a \$247 million basic cost-of-living-adjustment to help programs keep pace and maintain their workforce.

Secondly, vulnerable children are often the greatest victims of traumatic experiences such as community violence, poverty, substance use, or parental separation. COVID-19 and the isolation,

economic challenges, and uncertainty of this pandemic has only heightened the risks. By the nature of Head Start eligibility, children and families enrolled in Head Start are among those who have been most adversely affected by these current crises. Unaddressed, early childhood trauma leads to substantial, lifelong challenges. However, intervening at early stages not only benefits the child but has quantifiable cost savings across educational, child welfare, and judicial systems. With targeted funding that build on previous investments, Head Start will reduce the societal costs of these traumatic experiences by building on the abilities of the Head Start workforce to help children who have experienced childhood trauma.

In order to continue to properly care for children impacted by domestic violence, community violence, substance use, displacement, or other forms of immense trauma and to equip and support the Head Start workforce to address these challenges, our request includes \$363 million in quality improvement funding (QIF). This funding is used for training staff on the principles of trauma-informed care, funding additional mental health consultation hours, and reducing teacher-to-child classroom ratios.

Finally, prior to the pandemic, Congress began the process of expanding program service hours for hundreds of Head Start programs to more fully support working families and provide a higher level of sustained care and learning to enrolled 4-year-old children. This initiative tracked closely with requirements from the 2016 Head Start Program Performance Standards. Following the pandemic, families and children will need even more devoted care that offers them time and flexibility for parents to find new employment or transition careers. Investing \$730 million in the nationwide extension of Head Start duration would go a long way in supporting families during what will be a different job market and work environment.

Congress has addressed the unanticipated costs of COVID-19 for Head Start programs. These efforts have been a welcome reprieve that have been critical to maintaining safe services throughout the pandemic. Nevertheless, perennial issues remain that we look to address. For these reasons, we request that you make these necessary investments as outlined so that Head Start can continue to provide much-needed education, health, and economic development services to America's most vulnerable children and families.

Sincerely,

Katherine Clark
Member of
Congress

Lauren Underwood
Member of
Congress

Joseph D. Morelle
Member of
Congress

Also signed by:

Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress

Dina Titus
Member of Congress

Sylvia R. Garcia
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