

March XX, 2020

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Chairwoman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we write to request the Committee fund Head Start at the strongest level the Committee deems possible. At the minimum, we ask the committee to recognize the FY21 request from the President's budget keeping funding in line with FY20 levels. The critical investment we make in Head Start is an investment toward a more prosperous future for millions of our nation's children and their families. While there are significant constraints on the federal budget, continuing to support investment in Head Start is a fiscally prudent decision.

The mission of Head Start extends beyond preparing children for kindergarten and grade school. Rather, Head Start empowers families and communities with the knowledge and resources they need to ensure that future generations of Americans are able to succeed not only in their adolescence but at every stage of life.

The positive impact of Head Start's services is clear. Head Start children make progress in language, literacy, and math, while also demonstrating significant gains in social-emotional and cognitive development. They also are more likely to receive health screenings, immunizations, and develop healthy lifestyle patterns. Additionally, Head Start parents are more likely to increase their own educational levels and devote more time to learning activities with their children, and non-resident fathers spend more days per month with their children.

Later in life, Head Start children are more likely to graduate high school, go to college, have increased economic self-sufficiency, and achieve a higher quality of life. They are also less likely to be incarcerated or unemployed. For the federal government, as well as for local communities, Head Start's early intervention means less money spent on the criminal justice system, welfare, healthcare, foster care, and special education.

None of these immediate or long-term outcomes of Head Start would be possible without its community- and family-based structure. Each Head Start and Early Head Start program is led by a local agency that is attuned to the specific needs of the local community to ensure that local needs are met with local solutions—there is no one-size-fits-all approach. By working directly with local community systems to provide high-quality, evidence-based early education for children and families based on their specific needs and preferences, Head Start cuts through unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy. Additionally,

through an emphasis on parent engagement by involving the whole family in a child's education while also engaging parents and the community in the program's local governance structure, Head Start facilitates the strengthening of families and local communities.

Head Start's effectiveness comes from its ability to provide much-needed stability for children and their families impacted by trauma, addiction, community violence, or any number of adverse childhood experiences. This ability has been critical as opioids, addiction, and other traumas have gripped our communities and put children in harm's way. We have worked to ensure Head Start is able to address the children affected by addiction and trauma who require specialized care and attention continues to be on the rise.

In addition to the work that Head Start does with children and families, Head Start employs a workforce of more than 270,000 staff. Despite the support of more than one million additional volunteers, Head Start staff face continually high-stress environments while making near poverty wages. While early childhood is one of the lowest paid jobs for college graduates, kindergarten teachers with the same education make twice as much. As a result, Head Start program directors face persistent challenges to retain quality staff with adequate experience and training, and keep pace with rising healthcare, facility, and program management costs. We must continue to support them.

We understand the administration has set a requirement for programs to increase the annual hours of in-class time, and that a small number of Head Start programs currently out of reach of complying without unenrolling currently enrolled children and families. In order to ensure that working families are able to continue work and for our investment to have its best effect, children currently accessing Head Start should not abruptly lose this support.

As we face a difficult budget reality, we want to acknowledge Head Start's critical role in addressing the needs of working families and children who have experienced trauma, we again urge that the Fiscal Year 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill to prioritize robust funding for the program. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this effort.

Sincerely,

Steve Stivers
Member of Congress