

SUPPORT INCREASED HEAD START FUNDING FOR FY21

Dear Colleague:

Head Start offers education, health, and nutrition services to economically disadvantaged children, as well as parenting and employment support to their parents. Increased funding for Head Start is a wise, cost-effective investment in families and local communities that can lead 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.

In recognition of its importance, we are requesting that Head Start funds be prioritized in Fiscal Year 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations legislation and a total discretionary funding level of \$11,369,445,000, a \$756 million increase over FY20 enacted levels. This increase in funding includes a cost-of-living adjustment as well as vital quality improvement funding (QIF). Over the past seven years, Congress has repeatedly made Head Start a bipartisan priority and it is the most successful, longest-running, national school readiness program in the United States.

In FY21, as in each of the past years, Head Start programs will strain to pay competitive wages and retain highly qualified staff. Without the funds we request, the realities of our competitive economy will require programs to choose between cutting access for children or risk losing staff and failing to meet requirements that improve services for children, families, and communities. Additional funds will support a quality workforce, early intervention for children experiencing adverse childhood experiences, and continued quality education and interventions for our nation's youngest and most vulnerable learners.

For every dollar invested in Head Start children and families, the country realizes almost nine dollars in benefits through increased earning and reduced reliance on social programs. Furthermore, as communities across the nation learn more about the lifelong challenges that traumatic experiences pose to children and their families, Head Start can be an integral part of strengthening families. The Head Start program is vital to our nation's most at-risk children and families and deserves our full support.

We hope you will join us in urging House Appropriators to include increased funding for Head Start in FY21.

This letter will close COB March 9, 2020. Please direct any questions to Frannie.Einterz@mail.house.gov and sign on to the letter using [this form](#). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Katherine Clark
Member of Congress

Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress

March 13, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey, Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
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 Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Chairwoman DeLauro, and Ranking Member Cole:

We write to urge you to prioritize funding for Head Start, including funding to support the workforce, address the impacts of childhood trauma, and ensure no child loses access to Head Start in the Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill. Specifically, we request at least \$11,369,445,000 for Head Start, a \$756 million increase over FY20 enacted. This increase in funding includes a cost-of-living adjustment as well as quality improvement funding (QIF).

Head Start offers education, health, and nutrition services to economically disadvantaged children, as well as parenting and employment support to their parents. Increased funding for Head Start is a wise, cost-effective investment in families and local communities that 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.

After nearly a decade of implementing changes directed by the bipartisan *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*, Head Start programs are continuing to see the significant impact of this legislation for our nation's most vulnerable children. Through educational, health, and comprehensive social services provided to eligible children and families, Head Start promotes healthy development, school readiness, and lifetime success. With parents and community leaders at the heart of program governance, each local program tailors high-quality services to their community and families' preferences and priorities.

Standards of excellence and continuous improvement require a greater investment in a quality workforce. In FY21, Head Start programs will strain to retain the quality, qualified staff who they have invested in,

struggling to pay competitive wages or match the benefits provided by comparable jobs. Without the funds we request, the realities of our competitive economy will require programs to choose between cutting access for children or underpaying and losing staff. With the \$235,850,000 cost-of-living adjustment funding we request, Head Start programs will be better able to support their staff and continue to meet the needs of children, effectively utilize data, and implement systems of continuous improvement. These resources will ensure Head Start continues to deliver opportunities for success in school and life to our most vulnerable children, while maintaining a stable workforce and continuing to be a critical investment in America's future.

In January of 2020, Secretary Azar set forth a requirement that, by August of 2021, all Head Start center-based programs would need to ensure that 45% of slots are being served for 1,020 hours per year. While we agree that extended service duration is a critical pillar of quality early education, we need to ensure that existing program access to Head Start does not suffer as a result. In order to ensure program stability for those that are currently operating below this duration requirement, we request \$25,500,000 million be made available to achieve compliance.

Vulnerable children are often the greatest victims of traumatic experiences such as community violence, poverty, substance use, or parental separation. Unaddressed, these traumas lead to substantial lifelong challenges including significantly greater health risks and lower life expectancy. However, intervention at early stages not only benefits the child but has quantifiable cost savings across the educational, foster, and judicial systems. With targeted funding that builds on last year's investment, Head Start will reduce the societal costs of these traumatic experiences by building up the abilities of the Head Start workforce to help trauma-exposed children catch up to their peers while simultaneously supporting families.

Finally, through academic research, congressional panels, and oversight hearings, our understanding of the lifelong effects of adverse childhood experiences continues to grow. Congress and this Subcommittee made enormous strides in seeking to address this issue in FY20. In order to continue to properly care for children impacted by community violence, substance use, displacement, or other forms of immense trauma and to equip and support the Head Start workforce to address these new challenges, our request includes \$495,000,000 in quality improvement funding (QIF). This funding is purposed for training staff on the principles of trauma-informed care, funding additional mental health consultation hours, and reducing teacher-to-child classroom ratios. Taken together, addressing the aforementioned duration requirement and responding to trauma in children, the request includes \$520,500,000 in QIF, as authorized by the 2007 Head Start Act.

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