Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you consider Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations legislation, we urge you to prioritize funding for Head Start. Specifically, we request $17.47 billion for Head Start in FY 2024 to maximize the role Head Start plays in supporting our country’s most vulnerable children and their families.

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.\(^1\) Head Start programs have also proven to be resilient in their work to maintain quality programming and support children and families throughout the pandemic-related challenges of the past few years, and we must continue to invest in Head Start’s proven, crisis-tested work.

Head Start programs continue to face substantial challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff as programs struggle to pay competitive wages and match the benefits provided by comparable jobs. Strong outcomes for children and families receiving Head Start services rely on well-qualified staff, and well qualified staff should be properly compensated. Yet compensation for the early childhood workforce, including Head Start, ranks in the lowest 10 percent of professions, resulting in unprecedented turnover of Head Start staff and threatening the stability and ability of Head Start programs to properly serve a maximum number of children.\(^2\) This request ensures funding for an adequate cost-of-living-adjustment to help programs keep pace and funding to support increasing the compensation of Head Start staff to help attract and retain a well-qualified workforce.

This request also supports a strong investment in quality improvement funding (QIF), which provides critical flexibility to Head Start programs to address local quality improvement priorities. For instance, this funding can be used for staff training on trauma-informed care to ensure the Head Start workforce is prepared to help children who have experienced childhood trauma. This funding can also help programs employ qualified classroom staff to reduce child-to-teacher ratios, and can be used to ensure that the physical environments of Head Start programs are conducive to providing effective program services to children and families.

Finally, Early Head Start programs work alongside Head Start programs to provide comprehensive care and support for the unique needs of infants and toddlers as well as pregnant women. Early Head Start programs promote physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of infants and toddlers that prepare these children for continued growth and development and eventual success in school and life. Currently, Early Head Start serves only 11 percent of eligible infants and toddlers, preventing a continuum of care for our youngest learners and undermining quality. Recognizing that Early Head Start is an essential and growing component to ensuring that even our youngest learners can access high-quality care, we encourage you to include funding for Early Head Start expansion and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships. This funding level includes $1 billion for these elements, with grants awarded based on the unique needs of each community and its families.

For decades, and in a spirit of bipartisanship, Congress has united around Head Start to provide high-quality early learning and support to our nation’s underserved children. Nevertheless, perennial issues remain that we look to address. For these reasons, we request that you make these investments as outlined so that Head Start can continue putting children and families on the path to success in school, in work, and in life.

Sincerely,

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress

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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress

Joyce Beatty  
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress

Dina Titus  
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress

Haley M. Stevens  
Member of Congress

David N. Cicilline  
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Shontel M. Brown
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Joe Courtney
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Emanuel Cleaver, II
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Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress

Frank J. Mrvan
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress
Nikema Williams  
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Brittany Pettersen  
Member of Congress

Gwen S. Moore  
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree  
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Ilhan Omar  
Member of Congress

Marc A. Veasey  
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Daniel T. Kildee  
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Mary Gay Scanlon  
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Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

Kathy Manning
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress

Greg Casar
Member of Congress

Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

Becca Balint
Member of Congress

Deborah K. Ross
Member of Congress

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress
Shri Thanedar  
Member of Congress

Katie Porter  
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Judy Chu  
Member of Congress

Sean Casten  
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress

Madeleine Dean  
Member of Congress

Diana DeGette  
Member of Congress

Jasmine Crockett  
Member of Congress

Lucy McBath  
Member of Congress
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<td>Andy Kim</td>
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<td>Grace F. Napolitano</td>
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<td>Jesús G. &quot;Chuy&quot; García</td>
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Jonathan L. Jackson  
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