

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 1, 2024

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you consider Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations legislation, we urge you to prioritize funding for Head Start. Given the significant role Head Start¹ plays in supporting our country's most vulnerable children and families, we request \$15.67 billion for Head Start in FY25.

Head Start is an early childhood education model committed to 360-degree development of the whole child – providing a strong foundation which sets children up for a lifetime of learning and growth in school and in the wider world. Head Start programs offer education, health, and nutrition services to eligible children – those living in poverty, in foster care, or experiencing homelessness – as well as parenting, employment, and educational support to their parents.

This model is critical for bridging developmental gaps for children who may not have the same access to opportunities by providing access to comprehensive health and nutrition services, including medical and dental screenings, nutritious meals, and referrals to health care providers as well as high quality early education. By empowering and partnering with parents in their children's learning, Head Start fosters an environment that enhances children's academic success and overall well-being.

While there are disagreements on the use of taxpayer dollars, investing in Head Start remains a prudent course of action. Studies have shown that high-quality programs like Head Start generate significant savings by reducing the need for special education services, remedial interventions, and juvenile justice system involvement later in life. Analysis has concluded that every dollar invested in high-quality early childhood education programs like Head Start yields a return of seven-to-nine dollars in long-term savings and societal benefits.²

¹ Head Start includes all of the following: Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership programs.

² Ludwig, J. and Phillips, D. (2007). The Benefits and Costs of Head Start. Social Policy Report. 21 (3: 4); Deming, D. (2009). Early childhood intervention and life-cycle skill development: Evidence from Head Start. American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 1(3): 111-134; Meier, J. (2003, June 20). Interim Report. Kindergarten Readiness Study: Head Start Success. Preschool Service Department, San Bernardino County, California; Deming, D. (2009, July). Early childhood intervention and life-cycle skill development: Evidence from Head Start, p. 112.

This investment will support the Head Start workforce by providing funds for a significant cost of living adjustment; addressing local quality improvement priorities; allowing for expanded access to high-quality early learning opportunities, including birth-to-five programming; and continuing recruitment and development of staff for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) programs. A significant portion of this funding will help facilitate implementation of new federal standards outlined in the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking published in the Federal Register on November 20, 2023, and expected to be released later this year, estimated by the Office of Head Start to cost \$1.6 billion annually through 2033.

Head Start continues to face substantial challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff as programs struggle to pay competitive wages and provide proper benefits. 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 serve a maximum number of children. This request will provide resources to pay Head Start staff a competitive wage to help attract and retain a well-qualified workforce and ensure a significant cost of living adjustment.

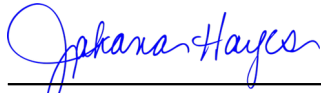
This request also supports an investment in quality improvement funding (QIF), which provides critical flexibility to Head Start programs to address local priorities. For instance, QIF funding can be used to address long-deferred maintenance issues to provide a more welcoming and nurturing environment for children and staff, and provide necessary training to deal with children with special needs including those who have experienced childhood trauma.

Current funding levels are simply insufficient to meet the needs of eligible families for access to Head Start. In fact, the most recent data available indicate that Head Start serves just a fraction of eligible families – Head Start reaches only 33% of eligible children, while Early Head Start reaches only 10% of those who qualify. While some programs have temporarily closed classrooms due to the workforce crisis, there are others – fully-staffed and fully-enrolled with lengthy waitlists – looking to expand their offering to more children and families. This request will fund expanded access to high-quality early learning opportunities, including birth-to-five programming, by increasing the number of available slots for Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships.

Finally, the percentage of Head Start teachers in AI/AN programs with the access and resources to receive their bachelor's degree lags significantly behind Head Start teachers nationwide. This request will expand the Tribal Colleges and Universities–Head Start Partnership Program, increasing the number of teachers culturally and linguistically suited to address the growing need for Head Start in AI/AN communities.

For decades, Congress has united around Head Start to provide high-quality early learning and support for our nation's underserved children and their families. FY25 represents an opportunity to reinvigorate this vital federal-to-local partnership. Congress must continue to invest in Head Start – our country's flagship early learning program – in order for Head Start to continue putting children and families on the path to success in school, in work, and in life.

Sincerely,



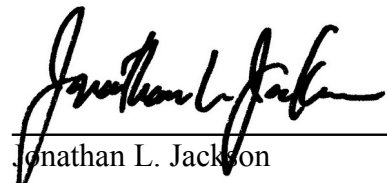
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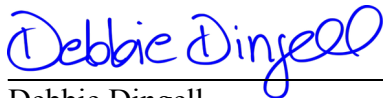
Gwen S. Moore
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JM Tokuda
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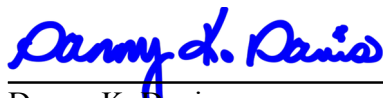
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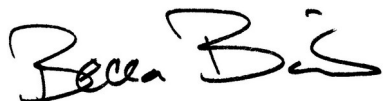
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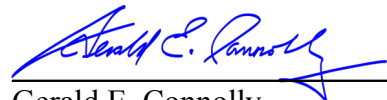
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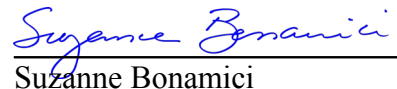
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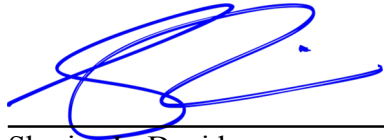
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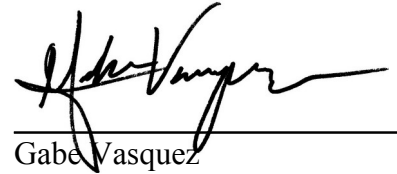
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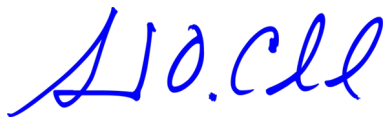
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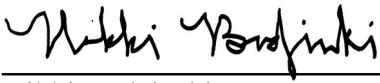
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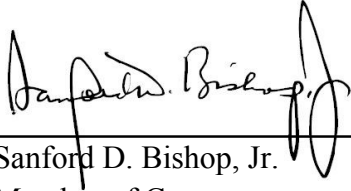
Angie Craig
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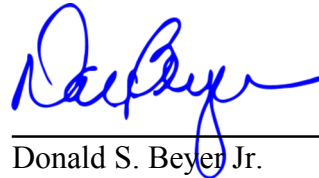
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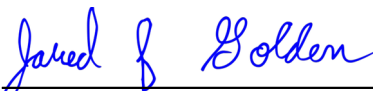
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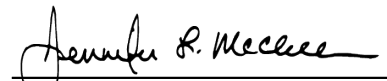
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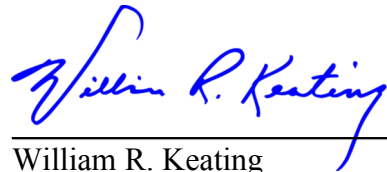
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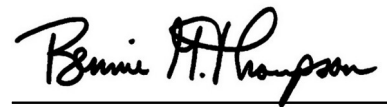
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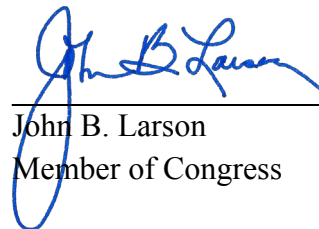
Dina Titus
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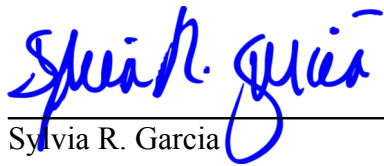
Bennie G. Thompson
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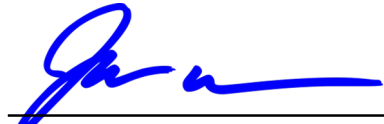
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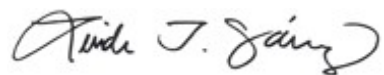
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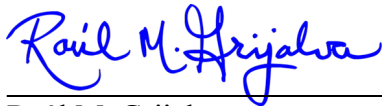
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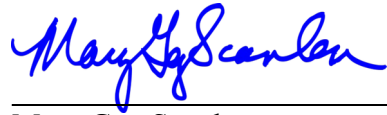
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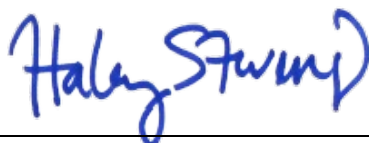
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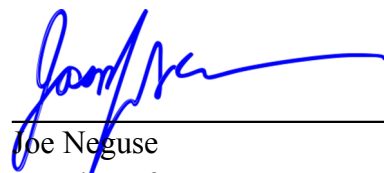
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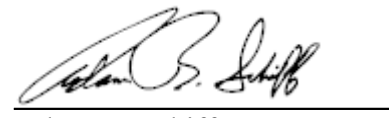
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Ilhan Omar
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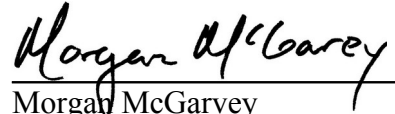
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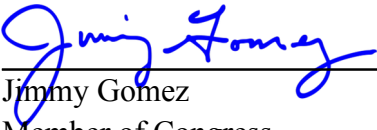
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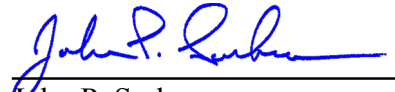
Brittany Pettersen
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Morgan McGarvey
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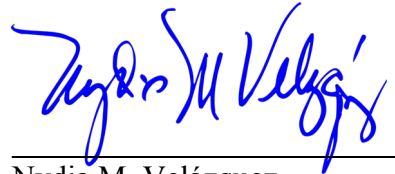
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John P. Sarbanes
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Al Green
Member of Congress
Scion of the Enslaved
Africans -
Sacrificed to Make America
Great



Nydia M. Velázquez
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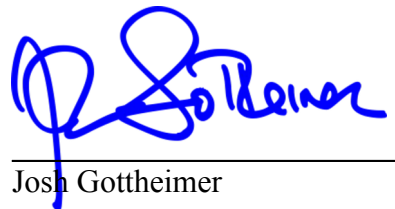
Bill Foster
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Abigail Davis Spanberger
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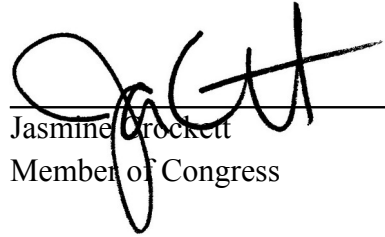
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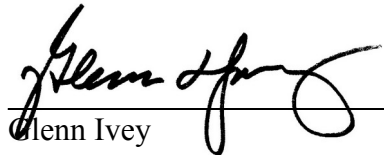
Jasmine Crockett
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Jim Costa
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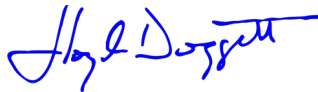
J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress



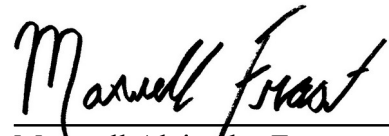
Glenn Ivey
Member of Congress



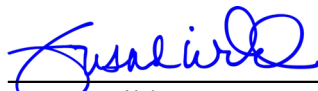
Eric Swalwell
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Emanuel Cleaver, II
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Patrick K. Ryan
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Nanette Diaz Barragán
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Seth Moulton
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Katie Porter
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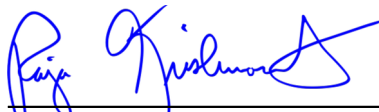
Andrea Salinas
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Lori Trahan
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Dean Phillips
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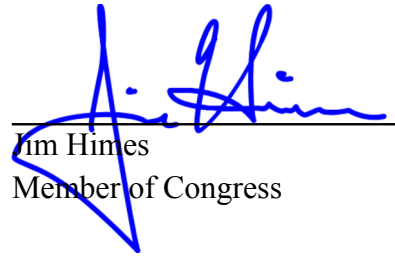
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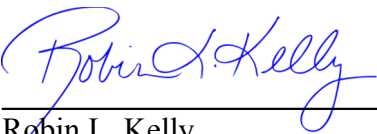
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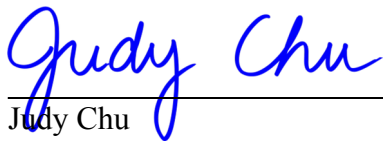
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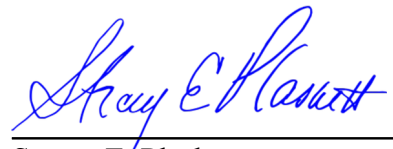
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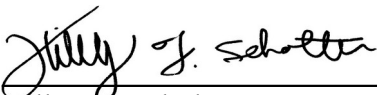
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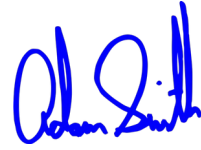
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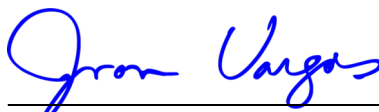
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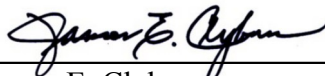
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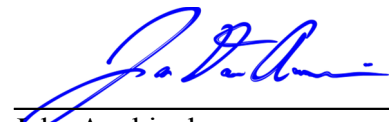
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C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
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Kathy E. Manning
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Ruben Gallego
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Mikie Sherrill
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Joe Courtney
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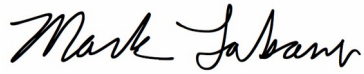
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Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
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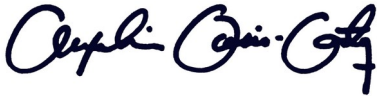
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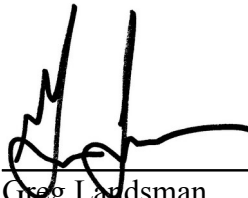
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