



April 18, 2017

The Honorable Mike Lee
 United States Senate
 361A Russell Senate Office Building
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jim Banks
 United States House of Representatives
 509 Cannon House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Lee and Congressman Banks,

The National Head Start Association and the 63 undersigned national, state, and regional Head Start associations write to express our significant concerns with the legislation you recently introduced, the *Head Start Improvement Act of 2017* (S.185 and H.R. 1921, respectively), which would give states full control over Head Start. While the legislation may be well intended, the proposed changes in funding structure would in reality undermine the quality, outcomes, and local decision-making that are fundamental to Head Start's success. The undersigned associations—representing the Head Start community of more than one million children and their families, 33 million graduates of Head Start, 250,000 staff, and 1,600 grantees—strongly believe that your proposed changes to Head Start are not in the best interests of the children, families, and communities served by Head Start.

It is important that we first address the stated rationale for the legislation, which is the assertion that Head Start children do not show academic improvements by third grade. In fact, the cited *Third Grade Follow-Up to the Head Start Impact Study: Final Report* found several positive improvements in language, literacy, and school performance among Head Start participants by third grade.¹ These include:

- A higher percentage of third grade students scoring at the proficient or higher level on the state reading/language arts assessment, and a lower percentage of children reading below grade level in their reading/language arts class.²
- Sustained favorable cognitive impacts for three-year-old Head Start children from high-risk households on reading and language arts skills in three language and literacy tests. This includes children from single-parent households and those with parents who are unemployed, receiving welfare benefits, did not complete high school, or had a child while 18 years old or younger.³
- Positive cognitive outcomes on language and literacy assessments for three-year-old Head Start children whose parents had no depressive symptoms.⁴
- Favorable cognitive impacts of four-year-old Head Start children of parents with depressive symptoms.⁵

More broadly, Head Start has proven positive impacts on language, literacy, math, school readiness,⁶ social-emotional and cognitive development,⁷ impulse control,⁸ and health⁹ before the time children

¹ Puma et al. 2012

² *ibid.*, p. xx

³ *ibid.*, p. xxxiv

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 141

⁵ *ibid.*, p. xxxiv

⁶ Aikens et al., 2013



NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

enter kindergarten. Furthermore, these positive impacts persist into the K-12 system, where Head Start children have been shown to have fewer attention problems, fewer negative behaviors, better cognitive and social-emotional skills,¹⁰ lower mortality rates,¹¹ fewer child welfare encounters,¹² higher academic and executive function outcomes,¹³ fewer special education services,¹⁴ higher math skills, less chronic absenteeism, and are less likely to be held back a grade.¹⁵ The positive impact of Head Start does not end with the aforementioned short- and mid-term impacts; rather, Head Start has long-term impacts that last into adulthood, too. Specifically, Head Start children are less likely to smoke,¹⁶ be arrested, or charged with a crime;¹⁷ they are more likely to graduate high school, attend college,¹⁸ and maintain better health.¹⁹ The notion that the impact of Head Start could be limited to third-grade academic performance fails to capture Head Start's far-reaching, proven impacts.

There are other significant reasons why block granting Head Start would cause great harm to children and families. The proposed funding structure and levels would damage local economies, ultimately resulting in fewer local jobs and harm to the longstanding local businesses and partnerships that Head Start programs currently maintain. State control over Head Start's performance standards would lead to varying levels of quality, weakening child outcomes and decreasing the return on the federal investment. State control over Head Start would add a new, unnecessary layer of bureaucracy in the form of additional state administration, resulting in fewer direct services for children and families. Trading local community control for state bureaucracy would decrease the flexibility that communities need to meet local needs, and likely result in states impeding the local innovation, alignment, and coordination that is currently standard practice.

Head Start has been an effective and strong program, delivering an advantage to our nation's most vulnerable children and families for more than 50 years. The current federal-to-local funding structure supports children's long-term success by giving them access to services tailored by their local community in order to meet their unique needs. The undersigned associations are adamant that the proposed changes would harm children and families in Utah, Indiana, and across the nation. While we disagree that the proposed legislation would improve Head Start, we do look forward to working with you to ensure a bright future for our nation's most vulnerable children and their families.

Sincerely,

Yasmina Vinci
Executive Director

⁷ Love et al., 2002

⁸ Aikens et al., 2013

⁹ Lumeng et al., 2015

¹⁰ Zhai et al., 2011

¹¹ Ludwig and Miller, 2007

¹² Green et al., 2014

¹³ Greenberg and Domitrovich, 2011

¹⁴ Zhao and Modarresi, 2010

¹⁵ Phillips et al., 2016

¹⁶ Anderson et al., 2010

¹⁷ Garces et al., 2002

¹⁸ Bauer and Schanzenbach, 2016

¹⁹ Johnson, 2010; Deming, 2009



National Head Start Associations

National Indian Head Start Directors Association

National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association

Regional Head Start Associations

New England Head Start Association
 Region II Head Start Association
 Region III Head Start Association
 Region IV Head Start Association
 Region V Head Start Association

Region VI Head Start Association
 Region VII Head Start Association
 Region VIII Head Start Association
 Region IX Head Start Association
 Region X Head Start Association

State Head Start Associations

Alabama Head Start Association
 Alaska Head Start Association
 Arizona Head Start Association
 Arkansas Head Start Association
 California Head Start Association
 Colorado Head Start Association
 Connecticut Head Start Association
 District of Columbia Head Start Association
 Delaware Head Start Association
 Florida Head Start Association
 Georgia Head Start Association
 Head Start Association of Hawaii
 Idaho Head Start Association
 Illinois Head Start Association
 Indiana Head Start Association
 Iowa Head Start Association
 Kansas Head Start Association
 Kentucky Head Start Association
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 New Jersey Head Start Association
 New Mexico Head Start Association
 New York State Head Start Association
 North Carolina Head Start Association
 North Dakota Head Start Association
 Ohio Head Start Association
 Oklahoma Head Start Association
 Oregon Head Start Association
 Pennsylvania Head Start Association
 Rhode Island Head Start Association
 South Carolina State Head Start Association
 South Dakota Head Start Association
 Tennessee Head Start Association
 Texas Head Start Association
 Utah Head Start Association
 Vermont Head Start Association
 Virginia Head Start Association
 Washington State Association of Head Start & ECEAP
 West Virginia Head Start Association
 Wisconsin Head Start Association
 Wyoming Head Start Association

cc: United States Senate
 United States House of Representatives