



# Missouri Head Start Association

**For Immediate Release: February 12, 2007**

**From: Missouri Head Start Association: In response to:**

## **Head Start Reauthorization**

### **“Head Start Improvements for School Readiness Act”**

110<sup>th</sup> Congress: Senate Discussion Draft: Released: February 2007

Members of the Senate HELP Committee:

Chairman: The Honorable Senator Edward Kennedy, (D) MA; Ranking Member: Senator Michael Enzi, (R) WY; Senator Christopher Dodd, (D) CT; and Senator Lamar Alexander, (R) TN

The Missouri Head Start Association (MHSA), representing 17,456 children and 27 grantee and delegate agencies across the state, would like to recognize the work and commitment of the Senate HELP committee regarding the recently released Senate Discussion Draft on Head Start Reauthorization, the “Head Start Improvements for School Readiness Act”. MHSA is encouraged to read several recommendations in the draft legislation that will serve to strengthen the future direction of Head Start.

- Suspension of the National Reporting System (page 144)
- Early Head Start set-aside up to 20% by year 2012 (page 35)
- Conversion of Head Start slots (page 36)
- Increase in income eligibility to 130% of the poverty guideline (page 114)
- Centers of Excellence (page 87)

The Missouri Head Start Association does however have concerns regarding several areas in the language of the Senate Discussion Draft. First and foremost as with any Head Start reauthorization effort, MHSA strongly believes that every effort to maintain the integrity of the federal to local structure of Head Start must remain intact and reauthorization language should be clear and supportive of that structure. Any attempt to strengthen the position of Head Start within the state system should include safeguards to ensure federal funding is not sub planted or subject to use at the discretion of the state.

Equally as important as retaining the federal to local structure of the program is the issue of appropriating funding at a level that ensures a quality driven program that will continue to serve the nation's most vulnerable children. Head Start has seen a steady decrease in funding over the past several years and programs have continually been forced to cut and reduce services.<sup>1</sup> Examples include: cut operating hours, struggling to provide individualized services, cut services for families, reduced transportation services, cut training and professional development including college tuition assistance, cut staff, cut staff hours, cut staff salary increases, reduced staff benefits, overloaded/overworked staff, increased staff turnovers, hiring freezes, cannot update facilities and playground equipment, and very low staff morale. Under the new federal budget proposed by President Bush, Head Start would continue to lose funding and the cost would ultimately be passed on to children who will not be afforded the opportunity of a “Head Start” and preparation for school readiness.<sup>2</sup> According to the National Head Start Association, Head Start and Early Head Start funding should be increased by \$850 million from fiscal year 2007 to fiscal year 2008 to make up for the estimated 13 percent real cut in Head Start and Early Head Start funding that these programs will have experienced since fiscal year 2002. Of this amount, \$126 million would be needed in fiscal year 2008 to maintain current enrollment — assuming a 1.9 percent COLA (Congressional Budget Office inflation number for fiscal year 2007); the remaining \$724 million would provide a cost-of-living adjustment for Head Start teachers and staff and would replenish Head Start program funding after years of budget cuts. Congress is not only entrusted with making decisions regarding the reauthorization of Head Start and other vital programs, they are also responsible for ensuring that appropriated funding is wisely invested in the nation's future, our children.

The following items have been cited as areas of concern as related to Senate Draft document by the Missouri Head Start Association.

- **Redesignation of Head Start Programs:** Efforts to more clearly define the terminology, “deficiency” are applauded. However, as stated in the proposed Senate Draft, programs could be up for redesignation/recompetition as a result of one unresolved deficiency. Also, the language implies that programs that have had a deficiency within the last three years would also be eligible for redesignation. MHSA does support quality programs as well as a system that supports programs in correcting cited areas of deficiency in a timely manner. Poor performing programs who have failed to demonstrate efforts to correct deficiencies should be eligible for recompetition. It is critical that this language be clear and concise.
- **Involvement of the Chief Executive Officer of the State in redesignation of a HS agency:** the CEO of the state should not be involved in this process.
- **Teacher Qualifications:** While we support the goal of 50% of Head Start teachers to receive their B.A. degree by 2013 as a national requirement/goal, there is some concern as to how this system will be monitored to ensure that programs that are not at that goal are not penalized. MHSA also feels strongly that language related to the “goal” should include “in a program leading to a degree”. The concern regarding the lack of adequate salaries and support for educational efforts still remains a high priority of concern for local programs.
- **Governing Board:** Limiting the number of years a Board member could serve would create a hardship for many programs.
- **Representatives of Governing Board:** Agencies should have the right to decide what community representatives should be on the board based upon the representation within the communities.
- **Maintain the current Policy Council – Shared Governance Structure:** It is critical that the current Policy Council structure of shared decision making be maintained. It is vitally as important to provide a clear and full understanding of the delineation of roles and responsibilities of the Policy Council as well as the governing Board and that each entity is held responsible in fulfilling said duties.
- **Training and Technical Assistance:** Increase local program monies for training and technical assistance to 60%. These additional funds could assist programs with the teacher degree requirement and ensure that local program training needs are met.
- Direction of the **Head Start State Collaboration Office** in the regard to the following areas:
  - Selection of the Collaboration Director: Maintain the involvement of the State Head Start Association in the selection of Collaboration Director and in the ongoing planning for and direction of the Collaboration Office.
  - Regarding the role and placement of the Collaboration Office: Add language that the state will ensure the Collaboration Director has a significant measure of autonomy and flexibility in carrying out his or her responsibilities. Each state should have the authority to determine the placement of the HSSCO to maximize system-building efforts.
  - Maintain and add to the language that the Collaboration Director must have a position with sufficient authority and access to ensure that collaboration with Head Start is effective, credible and involves a range of State agencies and other key stakeholders in State policy, planning and decision making.
  - Remove the language stating that the Collaboration Director serves as a State liaison between the appropriate ACF Regional Office and the State’s Head Start programs. Language on HSSCO roles and responsibilities should be flexible to allow for both federal and state priorities. State stakeholders, including the State Head Start Association and HSSCO, should guide specific initiatives and tasks, based on each state’s environment. Language on the expanded role of HSSCOs in prior reauthorization bills has been too prescriptive.
  - Maintain the language in this section related to HSSCO priority areas - health care, welfare, child care, education, community service activities, family literacy services, activities relating to children with disabilities, and services for homeless children. These areas are reflective of the Head Start program and support comprehensive services.
  - Maintain the language regarding HSSCO responsibilities and purposes to facilitate collaboration regarding activities carried out in the State designed to benefit low income children and families and to encourage Head Start agencies to collaborate with entities involved in State and local planning, including the State lead child care agency, resource & referral agencies, and educational agencies.

- **State Advisory Councils:** Reauthorization language should not mandate specifics regarding state advisory councils beyond their establishment/existence and representation from the Head Start community, the HSSCO priority areas, and the Governor's Office. States should determine how to meet the broad parameters and should determine membership, funding, and responsibilities of councils, based on each state's needs and system development. Federal reauthorization language should not spell this out. Because states are in different phases of their early care and education system building, it may be some can enhance existing councils rather than establishing duplicative bodies.

On behalf of the Missouri Head Start Association, the Board of Directors would like to say thank you for your commitment to the Head Start Program and this opportunity to voice our concerns regarding reauthorization.

Sincerely,



Donna Veatch  
MHSA Executive Services

Cc: Pam LaFrenz, MHSA President; MHSA Board of Directors; NHSA

References:

- <sup>1</sup> Direct Impact of Federal Budget Cuts and Continued Cost of Inflation and Potential Decreased Funding to Missouri Head Start & Early Head Start Programs: Released January 2006
- <sup>2</sup> National Head Start Association Special Report: Quality of Head Start Programs Imperiled By Steady Erosion of Funding: Released February 7, 2007