



**WSA** Washington State Association  
of Head Start & ECEAP



April 8, 2008

The Honorable Patty Murray  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

On behalf of the Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP (WSA) I want to thank you for your strong support of Head Start children and families. As you are well aware, reliable studies have demonstrated that children who attend Head Start are less likely to need remedial services when they enter school, less likely to be held back, and are more likely to graduate from high school and college than their peers that do not get an opportunity to participate in the program. In short, Head Start works.

Last year, a bipartisan Congress through your leadership renewed its commitment to Head Start. In doing so they strengthened the program in several important ways including requiring that half of all teachers have at least a BA degree and increasing services to homeless and foster care children. Our association was pleased with the final legislation and is in the process of assisting local programs in meeting the new mandates.

However, we are very concerned that the lack of funding for Head Start is making it impossible for programs to meet any new requirements and enhancements. In fact, what we are finding is that rather than programs trying to expand services, they are instead cutting services to children and their families. In particular, many programs are cutting direct service staff that work with children and transportation services. Other programs are increasing their class sizes and reducing the amount of classroom time for children. Several programs have had to eliminate centers altogether. Because of the "Head Start funding squeeze," low income children are the ones being short-changed. Here are just a few examples of what I have received when I surveyed our programs:

### **Joan Youngquist-Skagit Islands/Skagit Valley College Head Start**

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- We are eliminating transportation altogether in Mount Vernon where we have four centers.
- We eliminated one center and increased class size at our other centers.
- We reduced our Early Head Start services from 12 months to 11 months.

If Head Start were not to receive a meaningful increase this year we would have to do the following:

- Transportation will be severely decreased or eliminated.
- Transportation for homeless children outside regular service areas would be eliminated.
- Teachers will find it difficult to seek degrees, particularly BA degrees. Our staff will not pursue BA degrees without financial support.
- Our facilities are aging – we will not be able to afford major repairs to roofs, siding, and floors.
- With limited funds we have lost the ability to respond to changes in community and family needs with flexible program approaches and options. We could put an Early Head Start toddler class in every community, but we cannot afford the staff.

### **John Naegele-Puget Sound ESD Early Head Start Director**

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Our Early Head Start program serves very high risk populations - teen parents, incarcerated women, and single parent families with little or no education and skills. This requires a high degree of referral, and follow-up and guidance from family educators to help a family navigate community, state and federal systems. We serve about 10% homeless and 16% children with IFSP's.

This year I reduced direct service staff from full time (260 days) to part-time (215 days). This makes it harder to reschedule home visits and to complete all the documentation required. I reduced the child development manager to 215 days from 260. Family Support manager from 8 hours/day to 5.5 hours/day

Next year, we are projecting a \$62,000 deficit. I have reduced direct service staff as much as I can. I have not added funds for supplies and materials for the past 3 years. No equipment purchases for 7 years. It is very hard to convince teachers to go back to school for the AA or BA with little or no increase in hourly rate to reflect their degree.

### **Cheri Stefani-Puget Sound ESD Head Start**

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Many of our subcontractors are thinking of not transporting children at all because of reduced funding. This means, of course, that children will not be enrolled in

Head Start whose families cannot get them on a public bus or in a car to school each day. Most of our programs are suburban or rural so children often live quite a distance from their HS classroom. This would particularly impact our ability to serve very high risk families (homeless, etc.)

When there is not enough money to both support teachers to get BA degrees and asst. teachers to get CDAs combined with no pay increase incentives when they complete their degrees, it will be very difficult to meet this requirement

#### **Dorlan Hergesheimer - Lewis Clark Early Childhood Program**

Due to declining funding our program had to totally eliminate bus transportation services. This affects almost every child in our program (459) and essentially passes along this added expense and burden to families that are already under financial and other stressors.

If this flat or reduced funding continues we will be looking to cut hours, days, or weeks of service and finally, the number of slots.

#### **Kathee Richter - Neighborhood House Head Start in Seattle**

Our big issue is staffing. I think our program is in jeopardy of not being able to fully fund teacher positions in regards to the new requirements. I am also concerned about staff retention in the future. We have been hanging in there, however with multiple years in a row with no money for COLAs; this will jeopardize quality and services as well.

#### **Sandy Nelson – ESD 113 Sound to Harbor Head Start in Olympia**

We are just beginning our budget building process for next year, and I have determined that with no increase in revenue and with increases in health insurance and employer contribution to state retirement we are beginning the budgeting process \$56,000 in the red. That does not take into consideration the unfunded mandates of teacher degrees and serving the homeless. We can anticipate continuing increases in the cost of food, yearly increase in rents, increase in the cost of fuel for the buses, and cost of the disability component with adaptations needed when increasing the number of children with disabilities.

Cuts made the last year included the following: reduced the number of child days from 179 to 128 in two communities, affecting 34 children; reduced classroom staffing in each classroom; reduced substitutes by 75%; and cut up to 5 days from annual calendar of most component coordinators.

#### **Denise Schmidt-Family Services of Grant County**

We do not have funds to cover a projected increase of 30-40% in health insurance, increased gas (32%) and food costs or step increases. 63% of direct service staff in this program earns less than \$21,000 a year. I have combined positions

advocates/teachers, cut management positions, added more work to existing management and there is nothing left to cut or combine.

**Doug Lehrman – Educational Opportunities for Children & Families in Vancouver**

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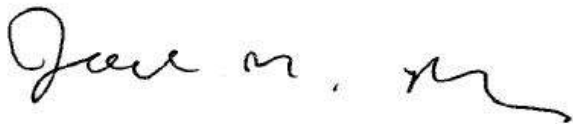
In Southwest Washington, we have had to make significant cuts in transportation services to Head Start families and are cutting back our transportation budget 50% this upcoming year, which will put us at 70% cuts over the past 3 years from where we were. With escalating food and facility costs, we will also be cutting back other services to balance those budgets next year. Our staff have not had salary increases for 5 years.

Attracting and retaining adequately educated staff will continue to be a challenge. Services to children of disability are in jeopardy in that we will continue to have difficulty hiring sufficient numbers of classroom assistants to provide disability services. We serve about 25% children of disability and the number is increasing annually, well above the minimum 10% level required by law and performance standard. Funding cuts continue to jeopardize those services.

I want to thank you for your support of Head Start and hope that you will continue your efforts to push for additional funding increases for Head Start programs. A meaningful increase will restore services lost and help local programs meet the new requirements in the Head Start reauthorization legislation. We believe that an increase of at least \$472 million in fiscal year 2009 would be sufficient in assisting local programs. The amount was calculated by taking the number authorized by both the House Education and Labor and Senate HELP committees in the Head Start reauthorization legislation, which was \$461 million, and adding in an additional \$11 million to make up for the cut in funding programs received last year.

If you have any questions please feel free to give me a call at (253) 373-9100. Again thank you for all you are doing on behalf of low income children and families!

Sincerely,



Joel M. Ryan  
Executive Director  
Washington State Association of Head Start & ECEAP