



# PENNSYLVANIA HEAD START ASSOCIATION

PARENTS, STAFF, ADMINISTRATORS AND FRIENDS AFFILIATED FOR CHILDREN

Wendy King - Board President

Blair Hyatt - Executive Director

## PHSA Public Policy Agenda for 2022

### Context

The pandemic has caused a disruption for children and families in the state of Pennsylvania. The most vulnerable families who qualify for Head Start and Early Head Start are feeling the greatest impact of the disruption. ( or are disproportionately affected - experiencing illness, homelessness, and mental health crisis). In order to address these pressing concerns, Head Start needs an infusion of funding and resources to help children and families recover emotionally, financially and educationally.

Head Start's cornerstone of early childhood education and comprehensive services children and families prenatal through age 5 is exactly what these families need to regain stability and to move forward successfully. Consequently, it is PHSA's position that the legislature ( federal and state) must provide the significant funding investments right now and in the future, to our Head Start/ Early Head Start programs that will allow them to fully address the pressing needs of all of the children and families we have promised to serve.

We know Head Start services are needed now more than ever. However, in addition to the disproportionate impact on low income children, the pandemic has also caused a disruption of crisis proportions in the Head Start workforce. The salaries of Head Start education staff are not competitive with school districts and other competing human service employers. We are unable to compete with fast food, convenience stores, large department store chains, and massive distribution centers' recruitment tactics and hourly wages in our communities.

It is time for this to be corrected. Across the state, the lack of available, qualified early education teachers, caregivers and social workers has forced the closure of classrooms, leaving empty seats. Without Head Start's early intervention, these children are likely to require costly remediation in school, and are more apt to experience the negative consequences of school failure.later in life. Without staff, Head Start programs cannot fully operate and serve the families who need it most.

The Head Start staffing crisis can only be addressed by increased federal funding from Washington DC and Increased funding from Harrisburg for the Head Start State Supplemental Assistance Program. .

We implore the US Congress and the Commonwealth of Pa to provide adequate funding to Head Start and Early Head Start so that we can hire and children can gain equal opportunity to high quality early education and comprehensive services that they need and deserve as soon as possible.

PHSA's Policy Agenda aligns with the Office of Head Start's April 2022 Four Priorities:

### Head Start Work is Heart Work

1. Advancing Equity - Serving our most vulnerable families.
2. Supporting Programs' Pandemic Response and Recovery
3. Investing in the Workforce
4. Reaching More Children and Families





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## Federal Funding

### Secure Increased Federal Head Start Funding in FY 2023 Budget

Secure in the FY 2023 budget funding that at minimum includes \$2.5B to raise Head Start/Early Head Start salaries so that programs can provide the high quality services Head Start/Early Head Families deserve, and a COLA that provides funding increases that keep pace with the inflation experienced in that past two years.

The salary compatibility and COLA funding increases should be in addition to the \$12.2B Head Start budget that President Biden has proposed for FY 2023. The additional \$1.16B in FY 23 funding proposed by President Biden should be use to:

- Expand Access to Head Start Programming
- Expand access for infants and toddlers through Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships.
- Dedicate funding to Head Start / Early Head Start for quality improvement, trauma-informed care, and extending the duration of in-class time offered by center-based Head Start preschool programs, including supporting children's needs with additional staffing.
- Include one-time funding for Head Start / Early Head Start infrastructure improvement, repair, and replacement.
- Increase funding to provide transportation services to children as needed.

## National Policy

Continue work with NHTS to press for flexibility for programs as they continue to work to serve families, particularly support from OHS when programs need to be virtual and/or under enrolled.

Work with NHTS to address nation-wide Early Care and Education professional workforce shortage.

Work with NHTS to address wage issues as they impact the Head Start/Early Head Start program's ability to pay and retain qualified staff.

Reauthorization: Continue working with NHTS to develop an effective plan for Head Start/ Early Head Start reauthorization.



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## State Funding

**Fully fund HSSAP to serve every Head Start eligible child and their families with wages comparable with school districts.**

**Rationale:** Currently at least 40% of Head Start eligible preschool aged children, those whose families live at or below the federal poverty level, are NOT able to access Head Start comprehensive, early childhood education and family services. PHSA believes that the highest priority for early learning funding should be access for our most vulnerable children, who are at greatest risk for future failure and costly remediation without early, continuous, comprehensive, high quality intervention. Fully funding HSSAP is an equity issue. Fully funding HSSAP is the most impactful action the Commonwealth can do to work to create educational equity for young children and their families.

**Recommendation:** Increase HSSAP funding levels by 30% to all Head Start programs in order to significantly improve payscale for all Head Start employees.

**Rationale:** The Covid -19 pandemic has shed a light on a chronic workforce problem and has reached crisis proportions. Without significant, retained increases so that the early childhood and social service workforce can be reshaped to a viable career opportunity, and provide parity with similarly qualified school district and county human service's scale, the Head Start and early care community will not be able to provide high quality services or any services at all.

**Recommendation:** Increase the funding of PA Pre K Counts program by 30% in order to significantly improve payscale for all Pre K Counts employees and expand facilities.

**Rationale:** Without significant, sustained increases that provide parity with school district scale, and provide adequate facility costs, the provider community will not be able to respond to opportunities for expansion to serve more eligible children. As research shows, The PA Pre K counts program must maintain high quality, in order to have the desired impact. Without the appropriate cost per child investment to adequately pay education staff, and provide environmentally safe, accessible and healthy classrooms, quality will be impacted.

## Early Childhood Campaigns

PHSA is an active member and supports the work of the Early Learn Pennsylvania (ELPA) coalition and the four campaigns (Pre K For PA, Start Strong, Childhood Begins at Home and Thriving PA) PHSA promotes the campaign's budget requests and advocacy. We believe that the problems that Head Start program's and their families have are very significant, and require significant funding increases to address effectively.

## State Policy Work

Integrating Early Head Start into any/all state initiatives for service to low income pregnant women, infants, toddlers and their families.

Expand Early Head Start opportunities by exploring developing state supplemental funds.

Support the United Way of Pennsylvania's Advocacy for State Funding of an EITC for Alice Families.

Work at the state level to ensure workforce strategies support continued program quality and expansion of Early Head Start/Head Start programs.