

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 29, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairman Leahy:

We write to request that emergency funding for Head Start programs be included in any future relief legislation to address the 15-20 percent operational cost increases attributable to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Head Start programs have been critical in providing low-income children and their families with meals, housing assistance and learning resources during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Like Child Care Development Block Grant-funded programs, federal Head Start programs help fill an important need for working parents who need child care to go back to work. However, without additional emergency funding, Head Start programs will face difficulties in re-opening for in-person instruction and continuing to provide the virtual and home-based services that have been so essential during the pandemic.

Head Start programs deliver high-quality, evidence-based education and comprehensive services to children across the country. With the help of Head Start, children are equipped with skills to enhance their social and emotional well-being, and receive health screenings, oral and mental health support, while parents can access resources to reach their financial goals and education needs. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Head Start programs quickly adapted and readjusted their Head Start model to implement innovative strategies to help vulnerable families in need during the public health crisis.

Throughout the pandemic, these programs have distributed food, technology and learning resources to families; opened their facilities for children of emergency essential workers and families experiencing homelessness; provided children with both at-home lessons and virtual home visits; delivered baby formula and diapers to mothers; and helped parents navigate the unemployment process. These services made it possible for families to receive critical health and education resources they would not have had otherwise, significantly enhancing the lives of children and their parents.

In a continuous effort to support children and families during COVID-19, Head Start programs have prioritized family engagement by developing creative ways to reach families in need. In Illinois, for example, one Head Start center created a grab-and-go prepackaged meal service for families because many children enrolled in Head Start receive most of their daily meal requirements from the program. Not only did this meal service help families feed their children, but it also helped alleviate a financial burden. In Alaska, several Head Start programs are also providing prepackaged meals as well as educational support utilizing online platforms for parenting education, virtual story times, and craft activities. In multiple regions of the state, Head Start programs are providing laptops, WiFi hotspots, free internet connectivity or I-pads to families to maintain services. For those regions where connections through technology is not possible, family advocates kept in touch with their families continuously through weekly phone calls and learning packets. Regardless of the state or region across our great nation, Head Start staff have remained in contact with children and families, and to this day, programs continue to adapt in the face of ever-changing circumstances.

Despite these innovative efforts, operating during a deadly pandemic has carried additional costs that will only increase as these programs begin to re-open for in-person instruction. Head Start programs anticipate a 15-20 percent increase in operational costs resulting from purchasing personal protective equipment, procuring enhanced cleaning services, hiring additional staff and upgrading technology to expand virtual learning capabilities and capacity to continue to serve all enrolled families. The emergency funding we are requesting would enable Head Start programs to cover these costs and to re-open for in-person instruction and enable more low-income parents to access the high-quality child care they need to get back to work.

The COVID-19 public health emergency has only reinforced how important and valuable Head Start programs are to vulnerable children and families in communities throughout the country in rural, urban, suburban, tribal and frontier communities. Thank you for your consideration on this important matter.

Sincerely,



TAMMY DUCKWORTH
United States Senator



LISA MURKOWSKI
United States Senator