



Head Start

The Alliance for Children and Families and the United Neighborhood Centers of America recommend that Congress and the President:

- Allow Head Start to remain in the Department of Health and Human Services, to preserve the program's social services to families such as nutrition and medical care
- Increase overall funding for Head Start by an additional \$7 million on top of the \$3 million increase proposed in the FY07 budget, for a total increase of \$10 million
- Increase degree requirements for teachers, merge Early Head Start and Head Start, and allow participation of children above the poverty line
- Pay Head Start teachers a competitive wage

Background

Head Start is a national early childhood program created in 1965 to prepare young children for school, and provide social services to low-income families. The number of children living in poverty has jumped by 13% in the last four years, increasing the number of children who are eligible for, and who need, Head Start. However, funding of the program has not kept up with the growth of eligible children. Only 60% of children who are eligible for Head Start are actually enrolled. Funding for Head Start teacher salaries is also lagging. The average Head Start teacher with a B.A. earns \$26,000 a year, whereas the average public school teacher earns \$42,000.

In addition to school preparation, the program provides services including nutrition, medical and dental screenings, early mental health intervention, child development, and parent education. It is the nation's longest running school readiness program. In 2002, Head Start reached 900,000 children through almost 2,600 community based programs. Currently, the Department of Health and Human Services provides \$6.6 billion in direct funding to local programs.

Head Start targets low-income children under five years of age—those most vulnerable to abuse and neglect. According to HHS data, infants and young children are most at risk for maltreatment, and the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect reports that children from families with incomes below \$15,000 per year face a similar risk. In 2002, 74% of children enrolled in Head Start were below the poverty line,

and 19% were on public assistance. In addition, 13% of children enrolled had disabilities, the majority of whom received needed services and care.

Head Start has been successful in preparing children for school while helping parents to build families. Data from the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES 2000) shows a greater increase in vocabulary and earlier development of writing skills among children participating in Head Start. Also, 94% of Head Start parents reported that they considered Head Start to be a helpful source of support for raising children. Participation in Head Start has long term effects for children, increasing the likelihood of completing high school and attending college, according to UCLA research (December 2000). Head Start has demonstrated its benefits to society: for every one dollar spent on Head Start society reaps about seven dollars in ultimate savings.

Relevant Legislation

In September of 2005, the House of Representatives passed H.R.2123, the School Readiness Act, to reauthorize Head Start. The bill keeps the federal-to-local structure which was in jeopardy in the 108th Congress. This structure is important to the effectiveness of the program. The new version of the bill also makes a number of changes to Head Start programs:

- Programs deficient in one performance area would be required to re compete when grants expire.
- Funding will be increased for migrant, seasonal and Native American Head Start Programs. The bill also allowed greater flexibility for rural programs to meet staff qualification requirements.
- At least 10% of funds would be allocated for Early Head Start. Programs with a greater need for Early Head Start slots would be allowed to convert 3 and 4 year old slots into Early Head Start slots.
- State Early Care and Education Councils would be created to develop a coordinated delivery system for early childhood services in each state.
- Head Start would be required to align curricula with K-12 standards.

This bill makes some improvements but it does not provide sufficient funding. The Alliance for Children and Families and the United Neighborhood Centers of America support a \$1 billion total increase in federal funding to continue the program's success. Proposals for funding in 2007 set at only \$3 million fall far short of what is needed. With additional funds Head Start can continue to raise standards for teachers, expand enrollment to all eligible children, and provide meaningful support to families.

Both the House and Senate have rejected the President's proposal to block grant the program to the states. The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee unanimously approved a Senate version of H.R. 2123 but the legislation has not been brought to the full Senate body.



Workforce Investment Act

The Alliance for Children and Families and the United Neighborhood Centers of America recommend that the President and Congress:

- Increase funding and support to WIA and all job skills training programs that help unemployed and low-income individuals access training, education and more sustainable employment without consolidating or block granting the system.
- Do not employ the Career Advancement Account Initiative. This system damages the most effective parts of WIA which allow WIA centers to be focused on the local economy and allows centers to tailor services to the needs of a specific community.

Background

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) is designed to overhaul our country's job-training system by connecting qualified workers to job opportunities. WIA provides a "One-Stop" customer-driven system that provides job training, education and employment services at a single neighborhood location. At the local center adults, veterans, dislocated workers and youth can obtain skills assessment services, information on employment and training opportunities. The system is broken down into three programs; one for adults, one for dislocated workers and one for youth.

The Workforce Investment Act includes accountability measures. States, localities and training providers are monitored using statistics such as job placement rates, earnings, retention in employment, and skill gains. Consequences are assigned for failing to meet these goals.

Funding for WIA has been severely cut in recent years. The current administration suggests a total overhaul of the system by consolidating funds going to the three programs into a single block grant at a much reduced funding level. This single block grant would fund a new Career Advancement Accounts Initiative which would provide vouchers to those in need of employment counseling or assistance. These accounts would be capped at \$3,000 per year to cover expenses related to education and training. Participants would be able to engage in the program for a maximum of two years at a maximum of \$6,000. This proposal would provide \$5.2 billion in FY 2007, \$680 million less than funding in FY 2006. This new program would also require

states to spend 75% of the block grant on the actual accounts, 3% on administrative costs and the remaining amount on services.

Legislation

In late June of 2006 the Senate passed legislation to revise and reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. The reauthorization includes funding through 2011 but at a lower level than in past years and includes the consolidation of the three programs into the suggested block grant system.

This legislation was sponsored by Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY). It intends to enhance the system by strengthening the "One-Stop" centers and providing more service options for participants related to employment and training. These revisions are aimed at youth and at improving the accountability of the system.

This legislation puts the administration's suggestions into action. It includes the \$3,000 minimum and the creation of the Career Advancement Accounts Initiative.

The companion House bill is sponsored by Representative Buck McKeon (R-CA) and is awaiting floor consideration.

Recommendations

The Alliance for Children and Families and the United Neighborhood Centers of America recognize the importance of programs that ensure individuals are able to effectively engage in profitable employment. To promote this growth they support federal policies that:

- Increase funding and support to WIA and all job skills training programs that help unemployed and low-income individuals access training, education and more sustainable employment without consolidating or block granting the system.
- Do not employ the Career Advancement Account Initiative. This system damages the most effective parts of WIA which allow WIA centers to be focused on the local economy and allows centers to tailor services to the needs of a specific community.



Federal Youth Coordination Act

The Alliance for Children and Families and the United Neighborhood Centers of America support passage and enactment of the Federal Youth Coordination Act.

Background

The Federal Youth Coordination Act (H.R. 856/S.409) was introduced to implement the recommendations from the 2003 White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth, which found that federal youth programs are administered across 12 departments and agencies with little communication or coordination among them.

The legislation was passed by the House in November 2005 by an overwhelming bipartisan 353 to 62 vote, with 163 Republicans and all Democrats voting for it. The bill was introduced by Representatives Tom Osborne, Harold Ford, Pete Hoekstra and Donald Payne, and Senators Norm Coleman, Mike DeWine, Lamar Alexander and Debbie Stabenow.

The Federal Youth Coordination Act (S. 409)

FYCA establishes the Federal Youth Development Council to:

- Ensure communication among federal agencies serving youth
- Assess youth needs and the quantity and quality of federal supports to help meet these needs
- Set quantifiable goals/objectives for federal youth programs and develop a plan to reach these goals
- Develop demonstration projects to focus on special populations of youth
- Conduct research, identify and replicate model programs

The Youth Development Council is composed of:

- 16 federal agency Secretaries
- Representatives from youth serving nonprofits and faith based organizations
- Youth representatives

The Council's Annual Report to the President and Congress is mandated to include:

- An assessment of the needs and well-being of youth
- Recommendations for better integration and coordination of federal, State, and local policies affecting youth
- A summary of the Council's work to facilitate interagency collaboration and the results of the collaboration

The legislation supports states by:

- Providing technical assistance and, subject to the availability of appropriations, making grants to States to support State-level coordination efforts
- Giving priority to States that have already initiated an interagency coordination effort focused on youth and demonstrated the inclusion of faith-based and community organizations in their coordination efforts

In order to truly untangle the array of services and weave them into an integrated web, the legislation seeks to promote coordinated efforts at local, state and federal levels. Subject to the availability of appropriations, the Federal Youth Development Council would provide technical assistance and make grants to States to support State coordinating councils.

The American Bar Association recently passed a resolution supporting the Federal Youth Coordination Act as part of a call for "federal, state, territorial, tribal and local governments to assure that adequate and appropriate services are made readily available to at-risk youth and their caretakers." The Alliance for Children and Families and the United Neighborhood Centers of America are in full agreement with this statement and recommend speedy passage and enactment of the Federal Youth Coordination Act.