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National Head Start Association
Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services and Education
House Appropriations Committee

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting the National Head Start Association (NHSA) to present public witness testimony this morning. 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of Head Start centers creating opportunities for at-risk children and families. As a proud Head Start alum, and on behalf of the 32 million Head Start alumni across our nation, it is my honor to represent NHSA today. We respectfully urge the Subcommittee to continue Congress’ enduring bipartisan support for this effective intervention by allocating **\$10,117,706,000 for the Administration for Children & Families’ Head Start and Early Head Start** programs in Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16.)

There is no doubt in my mind that Head Start was my chance to achieve success in life and that the return on the investment is clear. I have served our country as a military officer, a state agency head, and a speaker for the US State Department. I have gone on to have an over 20 year career in finance and economic development. I understand the need to examine the economic impact of human service programs such as Head Start – not just their clear social value.

My experiences as a member of our military, a successful entrepreneur who has hired employees, as a board member on public and private organizations, and as a parent volunteer are evidence of my contributions to the social and economic strength of our country and my community. I

would also bet that this significant multiplier of return on the Head Start investment is similar for my sister – herself a Head Start student - through her work as a court reporter in our country’s judicial system and through her private investments.

Why am I so convinced of Head Start’s impact that I volunteered to be here today? Please indulge me in a closer look at my family – which included a single mom and six siblings. Only the two youngest, my sister and me, attended Head Start. The four oldest, who did not have the benefit of a Head Start experience, have unfortunately traveled tough and sometimes tragic paths. My brother, the oldest, led a life of crime and spent much of his adulthood incarcerated. My oldest sister also led a very difficult life, struggling with drug addiction and passed away to a massive stroke prior to her 35th birthday. Four months after my oldest sister passed away, my oldest brother also passed away prior to his 35th birthday and while in jail. His official cause of death has never been uncovered. Of the two middle siblings, one has led a life of drugs and a dependence on government support. The other one has had some success however struggles to maintain a consistent job.

My youngest sister, herself a proud Head Start alumna, is one of the most successful court reporters in Houston, TX. She has been a court reporter for almost 30 years, owns numerous properties, and without a doubt has made the most of her Head Start experience. If one were to use my family as a “control group” so to speak, it is clear that six children were raised by the same mother, with the same family values, but ultimately ended up in very different places. What was the discriminating factor? I would contend that it was Head Start. Arguably there are other

conditions that contributed to my sister's and my accomplishments, but there is no denying that we were the only ones who attended Head Start and that one day I would fly for Presidents and my sister would become one of the foremost court reporters. Over the last decade or so I've met authors, mayors, entrepreneurs, Harvard professors and so on - all of whom are former Head Start students and making contributions to our society.

With these 32 million alumni stories in mind, we urge the Subcommittee in FY16 to continue and build on investments made in recent years by allocating \$10,117,706,000 for Head Start and Early Head Start. This funding will allow Head Start centers to continue services to 959,828 children and their families from birth through age five, continue supporting the recently awarded Early Head Start expansion grants and child care partnerships, support the critical Head Start workforce and enable a special focus on improving program quality. Specifically, NHSA is recommending a \$1.228 billion allocation for Quality Improvement funds which, as outlined in the Head Start Act of 2007, may be used for increasing the duration of instruction time, staff training, improving community-wide planning, improving classroom environments, strengthening transportation safety, and increasing hours of program operation. NHSA is also urging the Subcommittee to join it in asking the Administration to honor its promise to release, this spring, a long-overdue set of revised Head Start Program Performance Standards, aligned to the Head Start Act of 2007.

It is well known that one of the hallmarks of excellence in any early learning program is the caliber of its teachers. More than 70% of Head Start teachers have a bachelor's degree or higher in early learning or related fields, which significantly exceeds the 50% minimum mandated by

Congress in the 2007 reauthorization and enables the program to have one of the best-trained early childhood workforces in the country. However, the average salary for these degreed teachers is \$30,086 – lower than what schools pay teachers, and much lower than salaries for many other jobs with comparable education requirements.

Examples of programs losing their best staff to higher paying schools or other providers are plentiful across the country and focusing any increased investment toward workforce quality improvements will help enable programs to hold on to dedicated teachers, and provide a solid foundation for the good of students and families. To that end, NHSA supports the Administration's request of \$284,482,375 for workforce investments.

Recognizing the need for programs to retain staff, improve facilities, expand transportation services, and increase program duration, NHSA recommends providing \$1.228 billion to the Quality Improvement fund. Investing in the Quality Improvement fund, rather than mandating that funds be used solely to expand hours of service as the President's budget does, enables local programs to determine their area of greatest need and improve services in their community. This is especially true for rural programs and NHSA believes that this allocation of funding will still accomplish the Administration's goal of increasing the duration of instruction time to meet the needs of working families. NHSA encourages the dissemination of these funds, as well as all other funds in the Head Start base, in accordance with the process described in the Head Start Act - specifically that no less than 4.5 percent of the funds be made available to Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs and no less than 3 percent for American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start programs.

NHSA is pleased that the first round of Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grants have been awarded, resulting in an additional 32,000 vulnerable infants and toddlers now able to access high quality early learning. NHSA encourages the Subcommittee to include \$500,000,000 in FY16 to continue to support this emerging program. Given the challenges expressed by providers in the field and the collective desire to expand access to high-quality programs immediately, NHSA encourages the keeping of the option that allows these funds to be available for straight Early Head Start expansion. Mandating or incentivizing only one model of service, such as the child care partnership, eliminates the opportunity for many providers to compete for these funds, especially in rural and frontier communities that have few available partner options. The grants, whether for expansion, conversion, or partnerships, should be awarded based on how effectively the model design fits the needs of the community in question, versus an adherence to a partnership model that may be inappropriate to that locality.

For 50 years Congress has supported Head Start on a bipartisan basis. Every dollar invested by the federal government should seek a high yield impact and be used accountably. I trust that my story is proof positive that Head Start delivers these very results in return for the taxpayers' investment.