

Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
February 12, 2011

Statement of Kim Young-Kent
Executive Director
Tri-County Child and Family

Good morning, Mr. Chairman. My name is Kim Young-Kent and I am the director of Tri-County Child and Family Development Council in Waterloo, IA. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee today in support of Fiscal Year 2011 and 2012 funding for Head Start. In 1993, I met you at local event honoring you for your work on behalf of children. You asked me if I was expanding the Head Start program locally and I told you we were working on infrastructure and internal capacity. You said “Kim, get ready, you have to move when you can and you can’t afford to be left behind”. In 1993 we were serving 360 children in part-day, part-year programming. Today we are funded to serve 880 children, 568 in Head Start and we are the largest provider of Early Head Start services in the state of Iowa, serving 312 infants, toddlers and pregnant women. Thank you for the challenge; we responded.

On behalf of my 1,600 colleagues running Head Start agencies across the country, we would like to respectfully request that Congress maintain the investment in the expansion of Head Start and Early Head Start at the level of \$8.2 Billion. In Iowa, this would result in:

- The continuation of services for over 8000 children
- The continuation of services to the 460 additional children funded through the ARAR expansion
- the retention of over 46 positions created in the ARRA expansion
- the resulting economic impact from increased quality of services to families
- improved wages to attract the quality staff to help us implement improved programming for those 8000 children and families.

The Head Start program grantees, nationally, are the largest provider of evidence-based early childhood comprehensive care and education in country. In 2010, Head Start and Early Head Start dollars served nearly 1,000,000 children across the country.

Our nation’s children face greater obstacles than ever before—at the local, national, and international level. More and more children fall behind each day, even as our international peers are gaining on us in educational and economic outcomes. The science is clear that children need responsive care and attention during their earliest weeks, months, and years to build cognitive, social, and emotional skills necessary for healthy growth and development. High-quality care and early childhood education services lead to better academic performance and longer stays in school—as well as a plethora of other positive outcomes.

There is abundant evidence that Head Start and Early Head Start can help. Head Start produces measurable, long-term results such as school-readiness, increased high school graduation rates, and reduced needs for special education. And the more than 27 million Head Start graduates are working every day in our communities to make our country and our economy strong. Locally, our communities support Head Start—over 20 percent of our funding comes from local sources.

Here in Iowa, 8,191 children and their families are funded to receive services in Head Start and Early Head Start. In 2009-2010, 9,246 children actually received services as we kept enrollment full throughout the program year. 5,896 children lived in families who were working or attending job training. Only 1,867 children lived in families receiving TANF benefits. Our families are the working poor.

Let me give you a more detailed picture of how Iowa's Head Start children have been served. In 2009-2010, 9,129 children were given access to medical care. 8,737 children completed all of the medical screenings and were up to date on all immunizations, and 1,346 children had identified health problems, including vision and nutrition, corrected. 7,038 children received dental preventive care, and 922 of those children received needed dental treatment. Strikingly, 1,241 children were identified special needs/disabilities early and received the necessary services. An encouraging 3,496 children transitioned to kindergarten reading/writing/ready for school.

Iowa families have benefited in countless ways as well. 8,714 families received Head Start and Early Head Start services in 2009-2010—and 6,822 received at least one specialized family service such as parenting education, health education, housing assistance, substance abuse counseling, and child abuse and neglect services. 539 homeless families representing 592 children were served, and 49 percent of those families acquired housing during the program year. 64 percent of the families participated in the WIC program.

Here in the Tri-County area, we were able to serve 1,041 children and families during the 2009-2010 program year. 78 percent of our families that qualify for services because they live in poverty are working.

Head Start has been in Black Hawk County since the first summer time program in 1965. Services to Buchanan County started in 1968 as Head Start expanded to a school year program. In 1989 services began in Grundy County and in 1998 Early Head Start began in Black Hawk County. We are funded to serve 568 children ages 3 and 4, and thanks to ARRA Expansion, 312 Early Head Start children. We are the largest Early Head Start program in the state. Since 1965 this agency has served over 20,000 children whose families live in poverty in our three county service area.

Since the 2007 reauthorization of Head Start, quality improvements have been eagerly embraced and are being implemented as quickly as possible. Services to homeless families have been enhanced. We have also strengthened our partnerships with school districts and now serve most of the eligible four year olds in their neighborhood schools. This has enhanced the transition to school

for our children, parents and the school district. Tri-County Child and Family meets 100 percent of the teacher, assistant teacher and education coordinator education requirements outlined in the language, and in all of Iowa, 77.5 percent of the classroom teachers, and 80 percent of assistant teachers currently meet the requirements—which do not officially go into effect until 2013.

Additionally, our school readiness statistics continue to increase every year as we work with the school districts to assure the Head Start enrolled children receive the comprehensive services of nutrition, health, including mental health and family support services. When children are fed they learn better, when children have dental needs addressed they are able to focus on their learning. Families are able to focus on getting their children to school on a regular basis when they know they are working with caretakers who treat them with the respect and dignity deserving of folks who love their children and are trying hard to provide for them in tough economic times.

Over the past few years, Congress and the Administration have prioritized a robust investment in Head Start and Early Head Start through both the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and annual appropriations—these dollars have had tremendous impact in our community. For Tri-County that means we have been able to serve 72 additional children and their families in Early Head Start. We expanded to include Early Head Start services in Buchanan and Grundy Counties through a partnership with Community Action Operation Threshold, and we renovated an Early Head Start center to meet Department of Human Services licensing requirements. We used local contractors and workers to get that job done. We were able to add 14 positions and \$1,558,561 in economic development to the community. Across Iowa \$14.1 million was used to construct and renovate centers, and serve an additional 460 children, provide training and education to staff members, enhance salaries so they are competitive and good teachers are recruited and stay on to serve the neediest children.

Should the additional ARRA Head Start investment be cut, we would have to reduce not only the 72 slots here in the Tri-County area, but possibly more to keep up with the increased costs associated with food, rent, and utilities. This would be devastating at a time when we have begun to make real gains.

Here at Tri-County:

- 69 percent of the children leaving our Head Start program are entering school proficient in national assessments for literacy and language development;
- 66 percent of the children are proficient in math;
- 75 percent are proficient in science;
- 100 percent of our children were up to date on immunizations and 100 percent had at least one physical examination within the past 12 months;
- Our Early Head Start children participated in their well baby checks;
- 81 percent of our 3-4 year olds were examined by a dentist in our communities;
- 90 percent of our families improved nurturing and attachment between parents and children;

- 92 percent of our families increased their knowledge about child development and parenting;
- 94 percent of our families connected to additional concrete supports within the community—such as health and dental providers, mental health counseling and other agencies; and
- 90 percent of our families maintained or improved healthy family functioning, problem solving and communication.

And yet, we are still not serving anywhere near the number of families that are eligible for and have need for these services. It is in that regard that we ask the Subcommittee to maintain its investment in the expanded Head Start so that we can continue to serve Iowa's vulnerable children and families.

We know what this request means in a time when we must all buckle down and do more with less. However, Head Start is a smart investment – one of the smartest and most effective we make. Study after study has demonstrated that Head Start has yielded a cost-benefit ratio as large as \$7 to \$1.

It makes our families and children healthier— Head Start parents lower Medicaid costs by \$198 per family. Head Start has reduced mortality rates for 5-to 9-year olds by as much as 50 percent. Head Start programs reduce health care costs for employers and individuals because Head Start children are less obese, 8 percent more likely to be immunized, and 19 to 25 percent less likely to smoke as an adult.

Head Start graduates are 5 percent more likely to graduate from high school—and we know that high school graduates contribute more to federal, state, and local economies than high school dropouts do because these graduates earn \$9,000 more each year than dropouts. Further, Head Start saves our hard-earned tax dollars by decreasing the need for children to receive special education services in elementary schools.

For example, data analysis of a recent Montgomery County Public Schools (Maryland) evaluation found that a MCPS child receiving full-day Head Start services requires 38 percent fewer special education services and saves taxpayers \$700 per child annually. Based on a sample of 195 students, MCPS saves \$129,870 annually by having children in Head Start full-day pre-kindergarten versus no MCPS pre-kindergarten.

States can save the \$29,000 per year for each prisoner that it incarcerates because Head Start children are 12 percent less likely to have been charged with a crime.

It's also efficient—compared with other early childhood programs that have generated high Results Over Investments, one Harvard economist calculated that Head Start provides 80 percent of the benefits of small model early childhood programs at 60 percent of the cost. In other words, Head Start is operated more efficiently than these model early childhood programs.

We are very concerned that without adequate funding here at Tri-County, we will need to drop families from our programs and lay off 14 dedicated employees—leaving children more vulnerable as their parents struggle to find affordable care when they are looking for work. The question is whether it is best to make the investment now, or pay a larger price later? Dr. James Heckman, a Nobel Laureate in Economics at the University of Chicago, recommended to the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Reform, “Early Head Start and Head Start are programs on which to build and improve—not to cut.”

President Obama has made education an economic imperative and supports the idea that education starts at birth with families and community. In Iowa, Head Start facilitates both, providing low-income families with the resources to find and sustain work, learn to be better parents, and feel able to leave their children in affordable and high-quality care. We ask the Subcommittee to place a priority on comprehensive early childhood education and care through Head Start—ensuring our children start school healthy and ready to learn. The 1,045 children at Tri-County, the 7,146 children in Iowa and the remaining 991,974 children in the nation are counting on you.

Thank you.