



Connecticut Head Start Association

March 27, 2013

The Impact of Sequestration on HEAD START / EARLY HEAD START

Today – right here in Connecticut – nearly one in eight children are living in poverty. And as we look to Connecticut's Self-Sufficiency Standard – 21% are living at or near poverty (income below 200% FPL). In light of the devastating reality of poverty so many among us are facing, the unthinkable – the unimaginable – fell upon families, staff, and communities when federal sequestration began on March 1st 2013, causing across-the-board cuts for many areas of federal government spending, including "non-defense discretionary" funding which includes Head Start and Early Head Start. Head Start and Early Head Start programs are facing devastating budget cuts that will slam shut the window of opportunity for nearly 70,000 at-risk children.

For Head Start & Early Head Start here in Connecticut, I am compelled to share our latest condition as we end our first month since the sequester. Under sequestration, Connecticut is already witnessing plans for classroom closures & enrollment reductions, elimination of job positions, reduction/elimination of home-visitation services, reduction to behavioral health contracts, furloughs and reductions to staff hours, reductions to staff benefits, reductions to transportation, earlier program-year closures, and delayed-opening services for September/2013.

These are not temporary measures – they are permanent impacts that have already occurred, are occurring now, and/or are anticipated in the coming months. As we look ahead, we will serve less children and families most in need... Less families will be served by a research-based and clear return-on-investment service we call Head Start and Early Head Start – and yet the need increases in these times of economic distress. In addition, a skilled Head Start and Early Head Start workforce – comprised of individuals with bills...with families...with mortgages... – will be without a job.

As the President of the Connecticut Head Start Association, I see every day how these tough economic times are pushing more and more overstretched families out of jobs and into poverty. I also witness how access to quality early childhood programs can educate children, strengthen families, change lives, and transform communities. With research conclusively affirming the importance of a quality early childhood experience as a foundation for future academic and economic success, it is alarming to know that in Connecticut nearly 30% of youngsters enter kindergarten without such a critical foundation. Among these 30% are our most vulnerable preschoolers who desperately need, and deserve, a high quality learning experience.

Under sequestration, Connecticut Head Start programs are forced to decrease enrollment, which will increase the number of young children who will be entering our public schools without the foundation skills needed to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

By increasing the number of children who will enter kindergarten without a preschool experience, we are placing a greater burden on kindergarten teachers and adversely impacting our commitment to eliminating the achievement gap for our most vulnerable learners.

David Morgan
Chair/President, Connecticut Head Start Association