



NEWS RELEASE

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Head Start Will Leave More Than 3 out of 4 Hispanic Children In SW Unserved

Nearly three-quarters of a million at-risk Hispanic children in California, Texas, Arizona and the rest of the United States would be left unserved by the successful Head Start program under a controversial U.S. House bill that may come to a vote shortly after the July 4th holiday weekend, according to national and state-level Head Start advocates.

“This is nothing short of a national scandal: 77 percent of Hispanic infants and toddlers go unserved by Head Start today,” said Manda Lopez, executive director of the National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association. “The story is even worse when you consider the fact that only 19 percent of eligible migrant and seasonal children in our country are being served by Head Start. These are the children who most need the services provided by Head Start. It is astonishing to me that the House bill that may be voted on next week does little to address the most important issues of Hispanic Americans and ultimately leaves children behind.”

According to National Head Start Association (NHSA) data, 1,010,601 children were enrolled in Head Start during the 2001-2002 program year. Of that total, about one-third -- 303,613 children -- were Hispanic, including 73,224 in California, 47,288 in Texas and 10,018 in Arizona. However, the national Hispanic enrollment level in Head Start reflects only about 23 percent of all program-eligible Hispanic children living in poverty, according to the NHSA analysis.

Lucia Palacios, treasurer, California Head Start Association, and executive director, of the USC School for Early Childhood Education in Los Angeles, said: “We have to face the facts: This is a unique population of children who don’t get to start out in school in the same place as middle-class white children from suburbia. The Hispanic children served in California leave our programs with literacy skills in both English and Spanish. The 176 local Head Start programs in California work closely with the parents of each child so that they are better able to support their children’s educational goals. Through a total of 137,721 parent/volunteers statewide, we prepare parents not only to support their children in being more successful in school, but to do a better job in general as parents. And that effort pays major dividends for the futures of the 98,687 Hispanic and non-Hispanic children enrolled in Head Start in California.”

In addition to the under-funding issues, which are of greatest concern in the context of Hispanic children, Head Start advocates fear that the controversial House bill would dismantle the entire Head Start program. Under the measure, eight ‘pilot’ states (including, possibly, Texas, Arizona and California) would not have to maintain Head Start’s tough performance standards and the full range of comprehensive services that have been proven vital to making sure that at-risk children are ready to learn when they get to school. The proposal to dismantle the 38-year-old Head Start program has been criticized by leading education experts, organizations and programs, in the United States, including: Edward Zigler, Sterling Professor of Psychology at Yale University Emeritus and the “father” of Head Start during the Nixon Administration;

Purdue University Professor James Elicker; the United Way “Success by Six” program; Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; the National Head Start Association; and 100 other organizations.

Lusila Ortega, a Head Start program assistant director in San Benito, Texas, said: “This is a double-decker problem for Texas. First, we have the fact that the House bill doesn’t come close to serving the large and growing number of Hispanic children in the state. We are talking here about many thousands of Texas Hispanic kids who need this program if they are going to have a chance to survive in school. They are left out in the cold by the House. And then there is the threat that Texas could be one of the first eight states to see the current Head Start program -- which serves 67,664 total kids in 142 programs using 92,340 parent/volunteers -- wiped and replaced by some kind of untested, unproven and less comprehensive state-level program. So, the bill fails to meet the needs of Hispanic children in Texas since it doesn’t fund the slots needed to get the job done. And then the same bill threatens to wipe out a proven and tested program that works in our state in exchange for something that would be a distinctly inferior substitute.”

Allison McKinnon, a Head Start teacher in Phoenix, Arizona, said: “If you turn the money over to the states and they offer nothing more than glorified day care -- which is not what Head Start is about -- Hispanic and other kids in Arizona lose. If you turn Head Start money over to the states and they leave out key nutritional and health services, our kids lose ... For any Arizona member of Congress who would kill Head Start in this state, I ask them to first visit my classroom and see how the program really works ... We are talking about the lives and futures of 13,297 Arizona children and their families now served in 28 local programs. Please do not act in haste or without all the facts.”

For more information at <http://www.SaveHeadStart.org/understand.html>

Source: Myriam Grajales-Hall, University of California Spanish Broadcast & Media Services, Riverside, CA.