

Submitter: Alyssa Barklow  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee  
On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5514

To Whom it may concern, I am writing today to request continued funding and support for our local early childhood education programs.

Head Start's OPK programs provide children with a chance to begin public kindergarten well-adjusted and ready to learn. Eligible children primarily come from families that earn less than 100 percent of federal poverty level, are currently homeless, in foster care or from families receiving TANF, SSI or SNAP benefits. Early Head Start provides early learning and comprehensive child development along with family support services to low-income families with children from birth to 3 years of age. These programs help provide families with quality care and education for their young learners while also providing them time and availability to enter the work force. Our top priority is to stabilize funding for local head start and early head start programs. We are asking for \$387.843 million funding from the existing funding sources that support our programs, the General Fund and funding from the Student Success Act. This funding level would allow us to maintain existing services, and operate without significant budget cuts. Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide nutrition support, health care support, and prioritizes working with families to help them stay engaged and involved in their child's education. In my community, we serve over 300 children countywide.

I have personally benefitted from Head Start in many ways. When I graduated high school, I was given the opportunity to start as a teachers assistance in a Head Start preschool classroom. My employer helped provide me with a flexible schedule that allowed for time to pursue an associates degree in early childhood education. Over the next 10 years, I was able to move into different positions, including a teacher position in Early Head Start and later a teacher position in Head Start. I have grown up in the program, and have now graduated with my Masters degree in education and am a Supervisor in the program, working alongside new teachers. While I did not have the opportunity to be in Head Start as a child, the program has still helped shape me into the person that I am today.

Without Head Start, hundreds of families would be left without quality care, and hundreds of adults would be without jobs. Not only would our staff lose their jobs, but many families would be burdened with lack of care and would be left scrambling to find a safe and affordable daycare to watch their young students while they work out in the community. Over the last 60 years, we have been thankful for bipartisan support, and we look forward to continued support for many more years to come!