

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-1304**

September 8, 2021

Brandie V. Knazze, Commissioner  
Department of Family & Support Services  
1615 W. Chicago Ave, 5th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60622-5127

Dear Commissioner Knazze:

We write to express our deep concerns about the recent re-competition of Head Start and Early Head Start awards and the disproportionate impact this will have on Latino, Black, immigrant, and low-income children and families as well as early education service providers across Chicago. Given the critical role Head Start plays in children's early learning, it is urgent that the Department of Family & Support Services (DFSS) assist these non-profit organizations and the families they serve during this transition period to mitigate the harm this will undoubtedly cause and ensure a smooth and transparent process. We hope to identify the decisions that led to this troubling outcome and understand the city's role in the current and future application, selection, and funding processes to prevent disruptions like this in the future.

While we understand some of the reasoning behind the decision to drastically alter funding for service providers, the reality is that these funding processes and decisions have resulted in the inequitable distribution of slots. Failure to adequately account for the cultural and linguistic needs of our communities, transportation barriers, and the impact on the early educator workforce and other wrap-around services has left communities with an unacceptable lack of coverage and created tremendous uncertainty for local organizations and families who have been hardest hit by the pandemic. A hastily made decision and poorly planned transition can undo years of building trust in our communities and we are concerned that as a result, countless families may simply opt out of early education for their children.

While we thank the Office of Head Start (OHS) for extending the transition timeline, more action is required to protect the thousands of children and families affected by the re-competition.

Included below are several questions we would like to be addressed:

1. How many children are currently enrolled in early childhood education in Chicago by type of program and age? How many children are on waiting lists? What is the actual need (total population, not enrolled)? Please include demographic and geographic breakdown by ward, zip code, or congressional district.
2. Why did the City of Chicago request changes to slots in 2019 from OHS? What data was used to justify the need to adjust and reduce slots in early 2019? Were service providers

consulted on this request? Were members of the Chicago City Council consulted about this request?

3. What was the cost per slot in 2018 and how has it changed since? What is the current cost per slot and how much funding would be needed to maintain full enrollment of current slot needs? Provide a breakdown of cost per slot, number of slots needed, number of slots granted, and enrollment since 2018.
4. Please provide a review and a follow-up report on the re-competition process including scoring criteria and ranges for selection.
5. Please provide an update on the number of children successfully transitioned from sites without federal funding to new Head Start and Early Head Start sites. Please include demographic and geographic snapshot.
6. What information is DFSS communicating with families of their options and of potential transfers? How is information provided? What options are available for families that are assigned to sites that do not meet their needs (e.g., cultural and linguistic needs, proximity, etc.)?
7. Is the city planning to use any federal COVID-19 related relief funds, such as *American Rescue Plan Act* funding, as well as basic transfer authorities or administrative flexibilities to maintain the lost slots needed for Head Start services? If so, how much? If not, why not?
8. How often does the City of Chicago conduct evaluation of current early childhood education enrollment needs and what is the plan to effectively align with Chicago Public Schools Universal Pre-K settings?
9. What role does the Chicago City Council play in early childhood education oversight? When and how were members of the council informed of the reduction in Head Start slots in 2021?

Head Start and Early Head Start programs are a vital resource for families throughout Chicago and this country, especially as we continue to face a pandemic and its concomitant economic, education, health, and mental health crises. Ensuring that low-income families have access to appropriate comprehensive early education services is critical to the development of our youth. The breakdown in communication and coverage that is currently impacting many of our constituents is a cause for great concern.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. Given the urgency of this matter for children and families in my district, I ask you to respond to these questions by September 16th, 2021. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Patty Garcia in Congressman García's office at [Patty.Garcia@mail.house.gov](mailto:Patty.Garcia@mail.house.gov) or (312) 489-7726.

Sincerely,



Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
Member of Congress



Bobby L. Rush  
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress



Robin Kelly  
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Jan Schakowsky  
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Marie Newman  
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Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress

CC: Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot  
OHS Director Dr. Bernadine Futrell