

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 15, 2018

The Honorable Lynn Johnson  
Assistant Secretary  
Administration for Children and Families  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
330 C Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C., 20201

Dear Assistant Secretary Johnson,

We write to express our concern regarding Head Start's income eligibility requirements and selection criteria for post-9/11 disabled veterans. In particular, we urge you to use your discretionary authority to exempt post-9/11 veteran disability payments, for veterans with a disability rating of 60 percent or above, from calculations used to determine Head Start eligibility. We also ask you to provide guidance to Head Start agencies to help them conduct outreach to this important population and to consider prioritizing the review of these veterans' applications.

Currently, the Head Start regulations that define eligible income are issued by the Department of Health and Human Services<sup>1</sup>. By removing barriers to include the children of more veterans, we can help provide these families access the support they need to succeed in school, work, and life after service.

In addition, we urge you to release guidance to Head Start programs encouraging them to conduct outreach to post-9/11 veterans and to consider prioritizing review of their applications during the Head Start selection process. This prioritization will not make sense in every community and it should in no way hinder any current Head Start participants. However, as each community creates their own selection criteria based on their community needs assessment, it will ensure that programs are rightfully conducting outreach to all veterans and prioritizing review of veterans' applications where appropriate. We have a responsibility to ensure that all of our veterans and their families are provided the benefits and assistance that they so greatly deserve.

As you know, early access to education is crucial to the future health of our economy. Head Start takes a comprehensive approach to meet the needs of the whole child and whole family, something the families of veterans deserve to benefit from. Currently, there are over 3.7<sup>2</sup> million post-9/11 veterans in the United States with an unemployment rate of 3.1 percent, which is over the unemployment rate for all veterans, at 2.9 percent<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/public/head-start-act/sec-645-participation-head-start-programs>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/0fe6cff8-a551-4d0c-81b8-e8fd6f102693/veterans-day-fact-sheet-2015-final.pdf](https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/0fe6cff8-a551-4d0c-81b8-e8fd6f102693/veterans-day-fact-sheet-2015-final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/0fe6cff8-a551-4d0c-81b8-e8fd6f102693/veterans-day-fact-sheet-2015-final.pdf](https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/0fe6cff8-a551-4d0c-81b8-e8fd6f102693/veterans-day-fact-sheet-2015-final.pdf)

Early childhood education plays an important role in preparing children to succeed and will help make our 21<sup>st</sup> century economy stronger. Research shows that early learning initiatives, like Head Start, have provided total benefits to society of up to \$8.60 over a child's lifetime for every \$1 spent<sup>4</sup>, including reduced crime, lower anti-poverty transfers, and educational savings.

When enrolled in Head Start, families receive a wide range of individualized services including adult education, workforce training, parenting classes, dual-language classes, support for homeless families, and emergency crisis intervention. Head Start's preschool program promotes school readiness of preschoolers in a safe, healthy, enriching learning community. In every Head Start classroom, social and cognitive development is enhanced through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families. For decades we have opened the door to higher education for millions of service members and veterans. It is time we do the same for their children.

High-quality early education is a proven strategy for achieving a competitive workforce. It is vital that all children are able to benefit from it, and that we reward veteran families with access to opportunities like the Head Start program. We look forward to working with you to ensure our veterans and their families have access to the Head Start program.

Sincerely,



MARIA CANTWELL  
UNITED STATES SENATOR



PAT ROBERTS  
UNITED STATES SENATOR



EDWARD J. MARKEY  
UNITED STATES SENATOR



LISA MURKOWSKI  
UNITED STATES SENATOR



TAMMY BALDWIN  
UNITED STATES SENATOR



ROB PORTMAN  
UNITED STATES SENATOR



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
UNITED STATES SENATOR

cc. Dr. Deborah Bergeron, Director, Office of Head Start

<sup>4</sup>[https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/the\\_economics\\_of\\_early\\_childhood\\_investments.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/the_economics_of_early_childhood_investments.pdf)