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March 8, 2019

Michael E. Busch, Speaker of the House  
H-101 State House  
State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Speaker of the House,

The Maryland Head Start Association (MHSA) works to strengthen the Maryland Head Start community by providing advocacy for vulnerable children and families, leadership and professional development. MHSA is in support of House Bill 1413 with recommended changes to Policy Area 1 of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education's January 2019 Interim Report.

Transforming Maryland's early childhood programs to move forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century means learning from the best comprehensive education and family services program in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Head Start. It is vital that our programs work with the whole child and their family. Providing for the social-emotional, health, nutrition, and physical development of young children is as critical as early education. Equally significant is ensuring that we empower parents and families to be successful in their own lives and be fully engaged with the early care and education programs serving their children.

Far and long the premier program in working with low-income and high-risk families, Head Start programs are critical to the long-term investment of any community in which a program exists. Which is why maintaining full enrollment is the primary concern for the Head Start community as it pertains to the expansion of pre-K at no cost to three-year-olds and four-year-olds with income up to 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL).

While MHSA supports funding the expansion of pre-K, it may threaten the livelihood of Head Start programs throughout the State, especially those in small and rural communities, essentially, divesting in the community. To ensure Head Start programs can continue to empower families and invest in the community, MHSA has the following recommendations as it pertains to language, policy, and implementation laid out in Policy Area 1 of the January 2019 Interim Report:

1. As the expansion of pre-K is rolled out over the next ten years, in many communities where Head Start may be the primary program working with low-income and high-risk families with children ages 3-5, the public school, child care, and family child care programs will undoubtedly receive a number of those children. Many of these programs may not have the experience or access to the comprehensive services needed to work with such families. **Head Start does; it is the reason we exist.**

MHSA recommends it be written into policy that in areas where Head Start programs exist, the local education agencies or the local council/board that decides the placement of children will consider Head Start first when it comes to serving families with the greatest needs and highest risks.

2. **Policy Area 1; Element 1a; Implementation Decision; Paragraph 5** – It is written that “Local education agencies will enter into agreements with community-based providers to provide publicly funded pre-k programs...” MHSA believes it is necessary to define “community-based providers” and include Head Start, Private Child Care, and Family Child Care in that definition to ensure local education agencies partner with such providers. MHSA recommends a statement such as *“Local education agencies will enter into agreements with community-based providers such as Head Start, Private Child Care, Family Child Care and other developmentally appropriate programs to provide publicly funded pre-k programs.”*

MHSA also recommends that a local council or board composed of representatives from each type of community-based provider to help assess and develop strategies to address concerns and needs facing programs in each county. These councils may also help decide the placement of children.

Also, will the local education agency have the flexibility to develop agreements unique to each program? For example, Head Start programs are funded to serve a specific number of families with federal funding. If a Head Start program receives pre-K funding, will they be required to open a new classroom, or will the funds supplement a class already funded by federal dollars? Is this negotiable by each local education agency?

3. **Policy Area 1; Element 1a; Implementation Decision; Paragraph 5** -It is written that “agreements may also include a process for parents to register four-year-olds and three-year-olds for pre-K and to indicate a preference for the program setting...” Regardless of the process for parents to register, if parents can indicate a preference of program setting, MHSA recommends that it be mandatory parents are given literature about Public Schools, Head Start, Child Care, Family Child Care, and any other program that has an agreement with the local education agency.

4. **Policy Area 1; Element 1b; Capacity Building; Implementation Decision; Paragraph 8** – It is written that “The State will create a full tuition scholarship program for students who become lead pre-K teachers and commit to work in high-needs schools for a certain number of years.” Head Start is a model program that serves low-income and families with the highest need. While “high-needs schools” is not defined in this paragraph, MHSA recommends that Head Start be considered a “high-needs school or program”. We recommend the following change to the statement, “*The State will create a full tuition scholarship program for students who become lead pre-K teachers and commit to work in high-needs schools or programs such as Head Start for a certain number of years.*”
5. **Policy Area 1; Element 1b; Capacity Building; Implementation Decision; Paragraph 9** – It is written that “The State will significantly increase funding for the Child Care Center and Professional Development Fund to support ECE staff who are already working in **child care** programs in obtaining CDA credentials, associates degrees, and bachelor’s degrees.” The language “*child care,*” while the State understands that the term indicates programs which are licensed by the Office of Child Care, it is not always understood that Head Start programs are also licensed “child care.” MHSA recommends changing the language to “*providers that are licensed by the Office of Child Care including Head Start.*”

This language is present in the following areas:

**Page 47. Element 1b. Capacity Building Initiatives for new and current programs** – the following sentence says, “MSDE currently administers several programs to encourage child care and pre-K providers to improve the quality of their programs by pursuing accreditation, licensing, and other credentialing and technical assistance opportunities...” MHSA recommends the following “*MSDE currently administers several programs to encourage providers that are licensed by the Office of Child Care, including Head Start and pre-K providers to improve the quality of their programs by pursuing accreditation, licensing, and other credentialing and technical assistance opportunities...*”

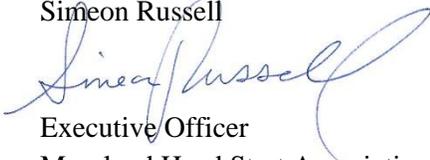
**Page 49. Element 1b. Capacity Building Initiatives for new and current programs** – the following sentence says, “New tuition assistance programs will be provided for prospective and current child care professionals pursuing a CDA certificate (one year), associate’s degree (two years), or bachelor’s degree (four years).” MHSA recommends “*New tuition assistance programs will be provided for prospective and current child care and Head Start professionals pursuing a CDA certificate (one year), associate’s degree (two years), or bachelor’s degree (four years).*”

MHSA applauds your efforts to transform Maryland's education system and move us into the future. We are excited to be a partner and look forward to playing an essential role in the implementation of this initiative.

If you have any questions, you can contact Simeon Russell at 301-744-9472 or [execdir@md-hsa.org](mailto:execdir@md-hsa.org)

We thank you for your dedication to the children and family of our state.

Simeon Russell

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Simeon Russell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Executive Officer

Maryland Head Start Association, Inc.