

I hope this finds each of you happy and healthy! It was wonderful to see so many of you at the IHSA Conference. It makes me happy to spend time with my Head Start family. There are several things to highlight this month. First the IHSA Government Affairs Committee has developed a White Paper on “Illinois Head Start Children Are At Risk - Fewer Children and Families Enrolled Means Loss of Opportunity.” We are looking for feedback! Please follow this link to read the White Paper. Submit feedback to lfrichtl@ilheadstart.org. Second, we are accepting Parent Ambassador Applications for our 2018-2019 class. Please follow this link for more information. Finally, here is a **Federal Legislative Update Road-Map**. There is quite a bit to cover in a short legislative update. So here’s my roadmap to help you follow along at home:

1. Budget Deal for Fiscal Year 2018
2. President’s Budget for Fiscal Year 2019
3. Immigration
4. CLASS and Designation Renewal System

Budget Deal for Fiscal Year 2018

The budget deal agreed to by Congress and signed by President Trump is ultimately very good for low income children and families. It lifted the budget caps fairly substantially over the next two years. It includes an increase of \$63 billion for fiscal year 2018 and an increase of \$68 billion for fiscal year 2019. This means that the size of the pie will grow making more room for Congress to provide funding for programs that serve low income children and families. And while Congress must still specify how much each program like Head Start will receive under these increased caps by mid-March there were several agreements put in place. These include:

- \$6 billion for opioid and mental health treatment services, prevention programs, and law enforcement efforts (including \$1.5 billion for supporting pregnant moms and babies described below);
- \$4 billion for college affordability;
- \$5.8 billion for child care subsidies;
- 10 year extension of Children’s Health Insurance Program; and
- 5 year extension of home visiting program.

One very interesting provision in the budget deal that impacts the families we work with, but was overlooked in the media was funding to support pregnant moms and newborns dealing with addiction. Senator Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) and Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) worked together to get \$1.5 billion into the budget agreement. You can read more about it here

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-congress-opioids/u-s-budget-deal-grants-1-5-billion-for-drug-affected-babies-families-idUSKBN1FT2F9>

Finally, we are glad to report that Head Start received \$650 million for disaster relief support for programs in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Texas and Florida.

So this is great right? Well before you get too excited there is still work to be done. While Congress and the President agreed on some specific funding areas what they didn’t do was lay out where the rest of all these funds would go in fiscal year 2018. As you know we are seeking a significant increase in Head Start funding to support our staff, quality improvements in the classrooms, transportation services, and those interested in increasing the number of hours provided to children. We are in the process of garnering support from our congressional delegation and working with the National Head Start Association to secure a meaningful increase. We have heard too many stories about the lack of pay for staff leading to high turnover, empty classrooms (because no teachers are available), and how unreliable transportation especially in more rural areas can make it really difficult for Head Start parents to get their children to programs consistently. Once we have a better sense of things over the next few days we may ask you to contact your members of Congress so stay tuned.

President’s Budget Plan for Fiscal Year 2019

By now you have probably read about the President’s budget proposal for fiscal year 2019. Here are my two takeaways: 1) it is a mean spirited budget that cuts services to low income children and families while continuing to provide tax cuts to millionaires; and 2) most of it will be ignored...remember I said most of it which is what I will get to in just a moment.

The President budget proposes huge cuts to Food Stamps, Section 8 Housing Vouchers, K-12 spending, CAPS, Medicaid, and even Medicare. Here’s a short piece from the Washington Post about what’s proposed

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/02/12/trumps-budget-hits-poor-americans-the-hardest/?utm_term=.86bce77353a8

and you can learn more about the specific proposal around Food Stamps here <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/presidents-budget-would-cut-and-radically-restructure-snap-food-benefits> which is particularly unkind.

The three most egregious examples you might already know about: slashing Food Stamps and replacing them with what appears to be a box of dried milk and cans of fruit and ravioli, incredibly deep cuts to Medicaid including limiting the amount available to spend by person, and slashing the availability of section 8 housing vouchers which seems mind boggling with so many people across the country struggling to afford housing.

Now remember I said the budget would be mostly ignored by members of Congress. But let me provide a caveat to this. There are a number of proposals in the budget around TANF, Housing, Food Stamps, and Medicaid that focus on instituting a work requirement in order to receive benefits. I think some of those proposals could be taken up as Congress works through its budget process and we should be prepared to weigh in with comments and strategic push back when needed.

Immigration

Advocates were frustrated that the final budget agreement did not include a deal to ensure that the DREAMERS would be granted legal status. As you know we have many DREAMERS working at Head Start and Early Head Start programs. But this week the Senate is set to start an open debate and process on immigration reform. No one knows for sure how it will unfold over the next week but we will update you as soon as we hear anything breaking or if information is needed.

Recently, another major issue came to light in the form of new draft rule being circulated within the Trump Administration and Congress that would modify the definition of public charge. This is a really simple version of this, but in short immigrants who are seeking citizenship, visas, or green cards must go through a legal process. As part of this process a determination is made to assess whether they are considered a “public charge”—can they support themselves. One strike against an immigrant applying through this process is whether they receive TANF. The Trump Administration wants to expand the number of public benefits programs that can count against an immigrant as a public charge to include most notably Head Start. This is a terrible and short sighted idea which would essentially punish low income children and force new immigrants to choose between a pathway for legal status or ensuring their children are taken care of and supported. Here’s a piece from Sara Mead that lays out the situation

<https://www.usnews.com/opinion/knowledge-bank/articles/2018-02-09/trump-proposal-to-punish-immigrants-via-head-start-is-immoral>

If this draft rule does surface it would probably be in March and it would involve an extensive comment period. At that time we will work with all of you on an appropriate advocacy strategy and comments.

Designation Renewal System: CLASS Tool

In December the Office of Head Start announced that it was seeking feedback on a proposal to modify the Designation Renewal System—specifically the CLASS criteria. In their proposal they would like to no longer put Head Start programs into competition that score in the bottom 10%, they would like move the threshold scores for emotional support and classroom organization, and they would like to annually update the threshold in instructional support. If you are interested in reading what they proposed <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/12/08/2017-26483/class-condition-of-the-head-start-designation-renewal-system>

IHSA sent several emails to collect feedback from our members and provided input to a national letter put together by the National Head Start Association that was submitted to the Office of Head Start. The national letter support getting rid of the bottom 10% criteria but takes a different approach on thresholds. It proposes to establish an “average” score for all three domains. This more balanced approach would allow a high or low score in a certain area to balance each other out and give a more holistic view of the classroom experience for children. The letter also make some recommendations around new teachers, cultural competency, and the impact on tribal programs which has been raised by our members. Once more information is available on this we will make it available.

Thank you for all that you do! Wishing you a wonderful March filled with much happiness and may the luck of the Irish be with you. *“May your pockets be heavy and your heart be light. May good luck pursue you each morning and night.”* -Irish Blessing for Luck

Take care,

Lauri