



NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Wanda Minick (850) 694-6477
Wanda@FLHeadStart.org

Head Start Leaders Call for Support in Responding to Opioids

Community-Embedded Programs Serve One Million Children from Birth to Age 5

TALLAHASSEE, FL – The Florida Head Start Association (FHSA) joined the National Head Start Association (NHSA) in calling on Congress to increase support to local Head Start programs that are helping young children impacted by the opioid epidemic.

Louis A. Finney, Jr. President of FHSA said, **"Florida has seen a thirty percent increase in children entering the foster care system due to being orphaned by a parent(s) tragic overdose. Many of these children are Head Start students, who have experienced severe trauma and are exhibiting high risk, challenging behaviors. Head Start has partnered with behavioral health experts to address this burgeoning issue. There is no better place to not only ensure children are safe, but work with families in a committed, caring and holistic atmosphere than Head Start. Additional funding in our state is urgent to better provide Florida Head Start Grantees the resources necessary to train teachers to work with challenging behavior children, help enhancing mental health services for infant, toddlers and children and establish additional support services for parents who are suffering from this epidemic."**

NHSA Executive Director Yasmina Vinci said, **"For decades, local Head Start programs have been at the forefront of countless challenges facing children and families, but the opioid epidemic is stretching them to capacity. As the voice of the Head Start community, NHSA is calling on Congress to fully activate the potential of Head Start as a force for change in treating this epidemic. Rather than continue to experiment with abstract ideas—or eat up precious time and resources launching new programs—Congress has the opportunity to invest in Head Start, a proven, comprehensive, and community-based intervention that would help stem the tide of this life-destroying epidemic. Children caught in the turmoil of this epidemic need solutions now, and Head Start is a critical part of that solution."**

The NHSA Opioid Working Group released a new policy paper, **"A Head Start on Treating Our Nation's Opioid Epidemic,"** which outlines specific recommendations for how Congress could activate Head Start as a community-embedded partner in treating children and their parents suffering from opioid and other substance abuse.

As the report details, many Head Start teachers and staff are already successfully reducing the effects of trauma on children through mental health consultations, individualized care, health screenings, and referrals. At the same time, Head Start programs are connecting families with mental health services, educational resources, employment, and economic opportunities—critical factors that can help those recovering from addiction change the course of their lives.

However, most programs do not have adequate resources to address this enormous, growing need arriving at their doorsteps. The NHTA Opioid Working Group’s policy paper builds the case for \$200 million in targeted grants to support a flexible approach based on community needs, using the infrastructure of existing Head Start programs to reach children and families. With adequate funding to local Head Start programs, Head Start would be better supported in helping drug-affected children “catch up” to their peers while providing effective interventions for parents and families.

“Activating the potential of Head Start would alleviate suffering for tens of thousands of children, change the life trajectories for parents caught in the throes of the opioid epidemic, and save American taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars in long-term costs,” Vinci said. “The Head Start pipeline of treatment is already in place. Congress just needs to turn on the spigot.”

The Florida Head Start Association (FHSA), is a not-for-profit association committed to enhance and support the capability of local Head Start programs in the delivery of high quality services for our children and families. FHSA is the statewide voice for more than 40,000 children and families, 11,000 staff and 120 programs in the State of Florida. Visit www.FLHeadStart.org and follow @FLHeadStart for more information.

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