

**Statement of Helen Blank, Director of Leadership and Public Policy,
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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I am Helen Blank, Director of Leadership and Public Policy at the National Women's Law Center. I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify on collaboration and coordination efforts among early childhood programs.

The reauthorization of Head Start should enhance and strengthen provisions for coordination and collaboration among Head Start, state prekindergarten, and child care programs in order to achieve critical national goals related to children and parents. All children should enter school ready to succeed. Meanwhile, parents should be able to work to support their children and have the resources they need to be their children's first teachers. The elements that are most essential are continued national leadership to ensure that Head Start can stay on its course of continuous improvement to enable our lowest income children to achieve their full potential and new investments to ensure that programs have the resources to do so.

In order to achieve our goals for children, programs must be required to meet the highest standards. These standards should not be sacrificed for the goal of flexibility. Head Start standards have been higher and more comprehensive than other preschool programs. They require attention to literacy, math, science, arts, physical, social, emotional and other areas of children's development. The standards are rigorous. They are regularly monitored for compliance. They guide good teaching and assessment to improve the lives and readiness of children and the quality of programs.

In order to achieve our goals for parents, programs must be able to respond to the needs of those who are working. Part-day, part-year programs are often inaccessible for parents struggling to support their children and become self-sufficient.

Over the past several years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of a high quality early education experience for young children with increased investments in state prekindergarten initiatives in a number of states. Unfortunately, with frozen federal child care funding, many states have simultaneously lowered child care eligibility criteria, raised parents' co-payments, and lowered reimbursement rates to already low-paid child care providers and as a result diminished families' access to early care and education.

Coordination and collaboration are valuable objectives, but also very, very complex to achieve given the numerous goals that early childhood programs are expected to meet simultaneously. Head Start, prekindergarten and child care pro-

grams are already working together in many communities to meet these goals. However, they face numerous barriers, many of them resulting from state-level policies.

Ongoing Collaborative Efforts

Leaders at the state and local level are already collaborating to use their Head Start, prekindergarten and child care dollars creatively both to bolster quality and to meet the needs of working families. Yet, these collaborations do not always stretch resources so that more children receive prekindergarten.

Most state prekindergarten initiatives allow Head Start agencies to be eligible providers. Five state prekindergarten initiatives are identical or nearly identical to Head Start.

Most prekindergarten programs are part day; some operate for as few as two and a half hours a day. State prekindergarten dollars are often combined with Head Start funds to provide a longer day or full year for children. In some cases, child care dollars are still necessary to extend the day until 5 or 6 p.m., when parents get out of work. California, Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Illinois, New York, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland, Texas and Wisconsin are among the states where local programs put Head Start and prekindergarten together. The Massachusetts prekindergarten program, Community Partnerships for Children, which is designed to strengthen existing programs serving three- and four-year olds, offers part-day programs funds to extend their day.

In La Crosse, Wisconsin, one Head Start program operates in an elementary school. The majority of children in the state's prekindergarten program (4K) also qualify for Head Start. They are enrolled in the state 4K program for half a day and Head Start for half a day. Teachers have joint planning time, share lunch with the children, and funds are co-mingled. Other Head Start children in the community are simply bused to a prekindergarten site after their Head Start day and the only co-mingling of funds is for transportation.

Iowa's Hawkeye Area Community Action Program adds funds from the state's Shared Visions prekindergarten program in eight classrooms to enable children to have a longer day. In other classrooms, Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds are used to extend the day. A state program that provides funds to local communities for children ages birth to five is used in seven other classrooms.

In Central Los Angeles, the University of Southern California pairs Head Start and state prekindergarten dollars to put together an eight-hour day for children in one location. In another location, responding to the lack of facilities in urban areas and the need for care for parents working long hours or varied schedules, the grantees keep a facility open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. using Head Start and child care dollars throughout the day.

In Brooklyn, New York, Builders for Families and Youth and the East Side House bring together New York State prekindergarten dollars with Head Start funds to support a longer day.

States are also melding Head Start and prekindergarten dollars to strengthen components of each program. In many states, state prekindergarten dollars are insufficient by themselves to ensure a quality program. Head Start dollars help to raise the quality of prekindergarten programs and allow programs to provide comprehensive services.

Iowa's Hawkeye Area Community Action Program adds Head Start dollars to Shared Visions programs to enable these programs to provide Head Start's comprehensive services.

A California school district grantee combines Head Start, state prekindergarten, Title I, and state First Five early childhood funds to create a full day with comprehensive services.

In Tulsa, Oklahoma Head Start dollars are used in state prekindergarten programs to support comprehensive services.

State prekindergarten funds are also enabling Head Start programs to have teachers with a Bachelor's degree in their classrooms, particularly when the state prekindergarten program requires teachers to have this credential. Wisconsin, New Jersey, Texas, Oklahoma, and New York are among states that use this approach. In Oklahoma, the public school generally hires the teachers who then work in Head Start programs. Teachers are school employees, and the school district ensures that the teacher meets all standards and receives the same compensation as teachers working in schools.

In New Jersey, Head Start programs in Abbott districts—the state's 30 highest poverty districts mandated by the New Jersey Supreme Court to provide children a high quality preschool education—are eligible for Abbott prekindergarten funds to enable them to hire teachers with a Bachelor's degrees.

Programs have also developed joint approaches to recruit children or ensure that services are not duplicated. In La Crosse, a Collaboration Committee meets once a month with representatives of Head Start, child care and prekindergarten programs. If Head Start has a waiting list, it directs families to the state's prekindergarten program. Head Start and the public schools also do collective recruitment and give parents information about all available programs.

In many areas of Washington State, one part of the district is served by the state's prekindergarten or ECEAP program (which is similar to Head Start) while the remainder is served by Head Start.

Head Start programs in states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Alabama, Michigan, New York, Texas, Washington State, Maryland, Minnesota, and Iowa have provided children with a full-day experience and brought Head Start's comprehensive supports to children in child care by offering Head Start in child care settings. This model is especially important in rural communities that find it challenging to meet Head Start's enrollment targets.

In rural Iowa, a Head Start program contracts with community child care centers and public school programs for part-day Head Start slots in existing classrooms.

Community Services for Children, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania brings Head Start to child care classrooms accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The agency provides funding to help child care classrooms meet developmentally appropriate requirements, offer comprehensive services to children and families, and training for child care teachers. Brooklyn's Builders for Families and Youth and East Side House also have innovative collaborations with local child care programs.

While most collaboration occurs on the ground at the local level, several states have formal agreements to facilitate collaboration.

Maryland has an overarching Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at the state level between the state Department of Education and the state Head Start Association guiding local MOUs between local Head Start grantees and the LEAS. Its purpose is for programs to work together effectively to improve outcomes and provide opportunities from children birth through five to achieve school success, to promote collaboration among the parties and their local counterparts and to encourage and support the development of local and/or regional agreements between public school systems and Head Start programs. The state MOU involves joint planning, staff development, curriculum, articulation, transition, and recruitment.

Oregon's Department of Education and the Regional Head Start office have a MOU facilitated by the Head Start Collaboration Project to implement a seamless system for the administration of the state prekindergarten and Head Start program that involves joint monitoring, joint guidance and regulation interpretation, coordination and sharing of training, coordination of calendars and events, coordination of funding and service areas, joint planning for federal and state initiatives, and joint problem solving.

Illinois, which recently significantly increased funding for prekindergarten, includes collaboration as one of six required components for new prekindergarten programs.

While there are countless examples of programs working together, there are still barriers inherent in state and federal policies that limit the quality and duration of services to children.

Barriers to Collaboration in State Prekindergarten Policies

Despite an increase in the number of states that offer prekindergarten, the bulk of funding is still concentrated in ten states.¹ Eleven states have no prekindergarten initiative and others have very small programs.²

State funding is not always stable. Ohio once made an impressive commitment to provide Head Start to every eligible child. Its state Head Start funds gradually were replaced with TANF dollars and currently the state, after a series of programmatic changes, moved its TANF dollars out of Head Start. This lack of constancy has wreaked havoc on programs that had expanded to meet the demand for more Head Start slots. Worse yet, it has left thousands of Ohio's poorest children without the benefit of Head Start. While funding for North Carolina's More at Four program has grown, it has been accompanied by a steady decrease in the state's

¹ W. Steven Barnett, Jason Hustedt, Kenneth Robin, and Karen Schulman. *The State of Pre-school: 2004 State Preschool Yearbook 28* (2004). Florida enacted a state prekindergarten program in December, 2004.

² *Id.* at 24.

Smart Start program which provides supports for children ages zero to five and their families.³ In 2003, funding for prekindergarten decreased in 21 states.⁴

Most states do not offer children and families the comprehensive standards that characterize Head Start. Twenty state prekindergarten programs do not require that any meals be served to children.⁵

Although some state prekindergarten is of high quality, there is significant variability and some state prekindergarten programs have considerable room for improvement. A recent six-state study by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute found that the quality of prekindergarten programs was lower than would be anticipated, and quality was lower than the quality of child care and Head Start classrooms assessed in other studies.⁶

Florida, which recently enacted a universal prekindergarten program, only requires teachers to have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential—no higher education at all. In contrast, Head Start has met the goal that Congress set out in 1998, for half of all Head Start teachers to have an Associate's degree. Last year's House bill raised the goal to Bachelor's degrees. The low teacher standards of many state prekindergarten programs highlight how important it is that, when facilitating increased coordination, all programs be required to meet the highest standards.

Barriers to Coordination in Child Care Policies

The crisis in child care funding and low child care standards create a great danger that coordination will mean lowering standards rather than raising them. State child care policies are one of the most significant barriers to collaboration. Many families do not have access to help in paying for child care because of long waiting lists and/or low eligibility cut-offs for child care assistance. As of early March 2004, Florida had over 46,000 children on their waiting list, North Carolina almost 25,000, Tennessee 23,000, Texas over 26,000, and California over 200,000.⁷

Another barrier to coordination is that, unlike, Head Start and state prekindergarten, eligibility for child care assistance is based on a parent's work, education, or training status, not the developmental needs of their children. If a parent loses their job, is between jobs, or experiences a modest increase in income, their child while still eligible for Head Start or state prekindergarten, may be no longer eligible for child care assistance and programs serving their child can no longer receive those funds. This can make programs reluctant to coordinate Head Start and or state prekindergarten dollars with Child Care and Development Block Grant funds, since the potential they will lose CCDBG funding in the middle of the year, makes it difficult for programs to budget and to ensure children an uninterrupted learning experience. Since early childhood programs operate on very tight margins, they do not have the resources to cover the costs that were previously paid for by child care funds.

California has created another barrier for working parents by precluding programs from using state prekindergarten dollars with child care dollars.

Child care reimbursement rate policies also limit collaboration. Some states pay on an hourly basis, only reimbursing providers for those hours during which care was provided. This can create a problem for providers who are serving Head Start or prekindergarten children for a portion of the day. They must generally reserve a full-time slot for a child without getting full-time reimbursement. Yet, the child care program must cover its full staff and other operating costs for all of the hours it is open.

Low child care reimbursement rates not only limit collaboration but also undermine the efforts to raise the quality of all early childhood programs. Thirty-seven states currently pay rates based on outdated market rate surveys. In some states rates are particularly low Michigan still bases its rates on 1996 prices and Missouri's rates for preschool-age children are based on 1991 levels.⁸ These rates make it nearly impossible to hire qualified teachers and in some cases purchase books and basic supplies.

Overall state child care licensing policies leave little room for quality. In 36 states, a teacher can begin in working in a child care center with no training in early child-

³Id at 50.

⁴Id.

⁵Id at 44.

⁶Donna Bryant, Dick Clifford, Diane Early, and Loyd Little. Early Developments: NCEDL Pre-kindergarten Study. (2005).

⁷See National Women's Law Center, Child Care Assistance Policies 2001–2004: Families Struggling to Move Forward, States Going Backward (2004), available at <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/childcaresubsidyfinalreport.pdf> (last visited Mar. 29, 2005) [hereinafter Child Care Assistance Policies].

⁸Id.

hood development. Only 10 states meet national experts' recommendations for class size and child-staff ratios.⁹

Barriers to Coordination in Head Start Policies

Head Start's eligibility cut-off at the federal poverty level is lower than all federal and state-funded child care programs as well as many state prekindergarten programs. This makes it challenging to bring together children in the same classroom.

Another barrier is the differences in teacher credential requirements among programs. Half of all Head Start teachers are currently required to have a minimum of an Associate degree in early childhood. If this requirement was changed to a Bachelor's degree in early childhood, it would make it easier for Head Start programs to collaborate with prekindergarten in those states that required similar degrees.

Head Start Reauthorization

There are ways within the Head Start reauthorization that opportunities for collaboration and coordination could be strengthened.

Head Start programs need more flexibility around the population they serve. If Head Start programs have a waiting list, they need funds to serve more eligible children. Programs that do not have waiting lists could be given more flexibility to respond to the needs of children and families in their communities and to collaborate with prekindergarten. Given the research about the importance of reaching children early, if states are committed to investing in high quality programs for four-year olds, Head Start programs should be required to serve three-year olds if they are not already doing so.

If more parents have increased their incomes slightly above the poverty line after they have gone into the workforce, Head Start should have the flexibility to serve their children who still need the benefits of Head Start. This would ensure that programs that have invested considerable resources in establishing quality classrooms would not have several empty slots. Similar to provisions in the Child and Adult Care Food Program related to family child care, the reauthorization could include a demonstration that allowed all children living within a low-income Census tract or school district to participate in Head Start without requirements for individual income eligibility determination.

With the research clear on the effectiveness of Early Head Start, Head Start programs could also be given the flexibility to move down to serve infants and toddlers.

Another way to encourage collaboration is to target a portion of Head Start expansion funds within those states with sizable prekindergarten programs on programs that collaborate with child care and prekindergarten programs.

A number of positive changes around state planning, state training offices that allowed professional development across all sectors of early childhood, state collaboration grants, joint unified planning on school readiness standards, strategic plans for outreach included in Title I of last session's House-passed Head Start bill would also further enhance collaboration and coordination. Increased teacher requirements included in last session's bill would greatly increase collaboration as well. However, this cannot be accomplished without additional investments to address teacher education and compensation in order to attract and retain teachers with higher qualifications.

These new incentives and tools for collaboration should be put in place and allowed to demonstrate that it is possible to increase collaboration while maintaining the core of Head Start and its ability to serve as a national model for excellence in early education.

Chairman CASTLE. Thank you, Ms. Blank. And I thank all the witnesses again. And I will lead us off, and I yield myself 5 minutes. I don't know what to really ask here because I want a solution that could take any one of you 5 minutes to answer. So you are going to have to sort of help me with your answers.

But the history of what we have done here on this reauthorization, the history of this is sort of interesting. Head Start has basi-

⁹National Child Care Information Center. (2004). "Child Care Licensing Regulations (February 2004): Child: Staff Ratios and Maximum Group Size Requirements." Vienna, VA: National Child Care Information Center at <http://nccic.org/pubs/ratios.odf>, compiled from licensing regulations posted on the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care website at <http://www.nrc.hchsc.edu>