

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education
Supporting SB 276 – Prekindergarten Education
Given by Erin Macey, Policy Analyst, Indiana Institute for Working Families
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Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee.

My name is Erin Macey, I am a policy analyst at Indiana Institute for Working Families, a former teacher, and a mother. I am here today first and foremost to express my gratitude to Senator Holdman for supporting increased state investment in early childhood education.

There will be plenty of experts here today to talk about the benefits of high quality early childhood programming for children, so I will focus my remarks today on the benefits for working families and in particular, on the unique value of Head Start for families who are striving toward economic self-sufficiency.

The Year 1 data on On-My-Way PreK demonstrates the powerful effect investments in early childhood education can have on families' economic trajectories. In the report:

- 51% of the families studied increased work or school hours
- 35% obtained new employment and
- 33% began school or job training

In an economic environment where more than one third of Hoosiers are struggling to afford the basics, investments in early childhood education are vital to families seeking access to financial security.

We want to see the state maximize the number of seats available and we believe this will require close collaboration with Head Start to ensure that the state is supplementing rather than supplanting Head Start dollars.

In other words, what we would hate to see is a family waiting in the lottery for an On My Way PreK voucher who doesn't realize they are eligible for Head Start. Moving them into that Head Start slot would not only be good for that family, but it helps other families who might not qualify for Head Start have a better chance of securing a voucher.

Head Starts currently bring approximately \$126 million into the state to provide early childhood education programming AND whole-family support to over 19,000 children birth to age five. Plus 26 program received additional funding to work toward full day, full year programming. Over the past few months, I've had the privilege of visiting several Head Starts, talking to parents and staff, and reviewing some of research on this program. I've been impressed.

- I've seen children and staff sit down to eat soup they made together, because the nutrition component of the program requires staff to expose children to a variety of foods and to model trying different foods.
- I talked with a staff member in Southern Indiana, who was a Head Start parent and loved the program so much she now sits beside parents in school IEP meetings as the Head Start disabilities coordinator, helping them navigate a sometimes complicated system and be effective advocates for their children.
- I talked with a mom who like many of us was terrified to let her first child go to school and Head Start staff in Bedford, Indiana invited her to come and participate for as long as she wanted – in fact, close to 21,000 Hoosier parents volunteer in Head Start classrooms and at events each year.
- I sat in on a policy council meeting in which parent representatives reviewed program budgets and discussed changes to the school's social media policy. This opportunity – a mandatory part of each Head Start program – has inspired many parents to take on other civic roles in PTAs and community organizations.
- Head Start family advocates across this state have walked alongside families as they found stable housing and got into postsecondary education programs. They've visited homes, helped arrange doctors' visits, and connected them to community resources when family budgets were strained. They've given families more confidence in their parenting skills and in their ability to reach their self-selected goals.

I could go on and on. But I hope I've effectively communicated that this is not just about ABCs.

Your investments now may pay dividends for children over the long term, but they will also benefit working families and the economy immediately. State funding for more seats in early childhood programs – maximized through coordination with Head Start – will put more Hoosier families on a path to self-sufficiency. Thank you for your time and I'm happy to answer any questions.