

**Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)  
Administration for Children and Families (ACF)  
Office of Head Start**

**Virtual Tribal Consultation – Summary Report  
Alaska**

**October 21, 2020**

**Office of Head Start Representatives**

**Ann Linehan**, Deputy Director of the Office of Head Start

**Todd Lertjuntharangool**, Regional Program Manager, Region 11 American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN)

**Greeting and Introductions**

Ann Linehan, Deputy Director of the Office of Head Start (OHS), welcomed attendees, recognizing those from other regions who had not participated in previous Tribal Consultations, and thanking the Tribal Leaders for taking the time to discuss their concerns with OHS. Ann shared how OHS is anxious to listen and understand their concerns more, particularly during this time for our country. She acknowledged that tribal communities have been impacted by the pandemic, and how keeping the tribal communities as safe as possible has been a major priority for the tribal leaders. Ann shared how OHS preferred traveling to meet with Tribal Communities in person over Zoom meetings and sent virtual handshakes and hugs to all participants before turning the presentation over to Todd.

**Transcript from OHS Overview/Presentation**

Todd Lertjuntharangool  
Regional Program Manager  
Region 11/American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN)  
Office of Head Start

Mr. Todd Lertjuntharangool thanked Deputy Director Linehan and greeted the attendees. He gave a brief introduction, sharing his background and allowed the other members of the AIAN leadership team, Delroy Grant and Trevondia Boykin, to introduce themselves before transitioning to the OHS PowerPoint presentation.

**National Overview**

The OHS funds preschool programs which serve nearly a million children and their families each year. The majority of programs provide services to three and four-year-old children. We do also have a growing number of programs who are serving infants, toddlers, and pregnant women in Early Head Start programs.

**Head Start Legislation and Regulations**

To administer and oversee these grants, OHS is governed by several pieces of legislation and policy which include the 2007 Head Start Act, Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), and the various fiscal regulations which govern the administration and oversight of federal funding.

## **Purpose and Service Models**

Head Start and Early Head Start programs offer a variety of service models, days, and hours depending on the needs of the local community. Many of those Head Start programs and Early Head Start programs are center based and those services are provided in a classroom setting. Other programs are located in childcare settings and family childcare homes and we do have some programs who also offer home based services with dedicated staff who go to the home and work with that child and that family.

Head Start programs provide services targeted at supporting children's growth and development in a positive learning environment through a variety of services, which include Early Learning, Health, and Family Well-being.

## **OHS Structure**

In addition to our central office located here in Washington DC, we also have 12 Regional Offices. Through that structure, we are responsible for funding, for ensuring that our programs have access to training and technical assistance, for monitoring those programs, and of course, for implementing leadership priorities. 10 of the Regional Offices are geographic and are located at various cities across the United States. 2 of our Regional Offices support specific populations and those are Region 11 which support all of our American Indian and Alaska Native programs and Region 12 which supports all of our Migrant and Seasonal Programs.

## **Region 11 - American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) Overview**

Region 11 supports all of our tribal Head Start and Early Head Start programs across 26 states. Currently our region funds approximately 180 grants across 154 grantees. These numbers fluctuate as programs may relinquish their grants or programs may apply for and obtain more grants through the OHS. Currently in Region 11, we serve over 17,000 Head Start children, over 4,700 Early Head Start children.

## **2019 Tribal Consultations**

Prior to discussing work that has taken place in 2020, we feel it is appropriate to start with where we left off in 2019 and some of the things that we heard in our discussions with tribal leadership. OHS participated in five tribal consultations around the country in 2019 and some of the most common areas for discussion were around funding, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and implementation of monitoring overall, and concerns around staffing, that included the credentialing of staff, staff turnover, and staff salaries.

## **Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Funding Update**

Region 11 will have funded approximately \$299 million to tribal grantees around the country in FY20. This figure is inclusive of \$5.6 million for Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) increases and \$9.2 million for increases for Quality Improvement.

## **What have we been up to in 2020?**

Many of the areas we have focused on over the past year were driven by what we heard in consultations in 2019. One thing we did was we brought together several members from AIAN communities: long standing directors and individuals who have provided testimony in past consultations, to help the OHS identify ways that we could tweak the way we implement the CLASS tool to make it of more benefit to our tribal grantees. Something we were extremely thankful for. That group of individuals did provide several recommendations that we were really excited about and that we believe could be implemented. Due to COVID-19, CLASS reviews have been paused. We are optimistic that once these commence again, we can continue our dialogs and explore where we can implement suggestions.

Another concern identified during 2019 tribal consultations was the lack of CLASS observers and reviewers from AIAN communities. We did a couple things to try to be more responsive to this throughout 2019 and into 2020. One thing that we did was, we did a bit more heavy recruiting. We started sending out e-blasts to ensure that our tribal grantees were aware of how they could apply to become observers and reviewers. We were also supported by our TA network who also shared information at the various events they were facilitating. Our Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) also reached out to tribal colleges and tried to make sure that they were aware of how potential observers and reviewers could apply. We also relaxed some of our previous credentialing requirements for CLASS observers to support recruitment. These efforts have not produced the type of results that we had hoped they would. So one additional thing we did, we came back to the table made the decision to team up with Teachstone, the founders of the CLASS tool for what we called the AIAN CLASS Pilot. Through this Pilot, OHS was able to provide virtual CLASS training for staff members from AIAN communities at no cost to them. We reached out to staff members from programs originally scheduled to receive CLASS reviews in FY21. Through this Pilot, training was provided to over 30 individuals in the months of June and July of 2020. As a result, 12 AIAN program staff were able to obtain their CLASS reliability. What we do hope is that these individuals who became reliable can potentially serve as observers to support CLASS reviews in Region 11 in the future.

A huge priority for us was to ensure that we got out all of the CARES Act funding that was meant for our tribal Head Start and Early Head Start grantees.

In 2020 OHS also facilitated several national competitive processes for various contracts. These included our Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) contract, our National Centers, and our Monitoring contracts.

### **COVID-19**

On March 13th a national emergency was declared. Virtually all tribal programs were shut down or had to temporarily suspend service. One thing that I do want to make note of here and thank Tribal Leadership for is the fact that so many communities and tribes reacted so swiftly in making big decisions that I think helped mitigate the spread of the virus in their communities.

Region 11 funded \$19.2 million to tribal programs to prepare, prevent, and respond to COVID-19 through the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security or CARES Act.

Also during this time, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration for Children and Families, and OHS have issued unprecedented flexibilities to alleviate the administrative burden on grantees while they focus on COVID-19 and the safety of their communities.

During this summer, OHS also implemented the Collaborating Actively in Meaningful Planning (C.A.M.P) webinar series to support grantees. Those webinars were recorded and are still available on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website. If you have not already seen those, I definitely encourage folks to make time to view these informative webinars.

### **Funding Opportunities in 2020**

In 2020, OHS published several Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs). These included \$4 million for Tribal Colleges and Universities and Head Start Partnerships. In September OHS awarded 6 grants to tribal colleges to support higher education opportunities for AIAN Staff to obtain credentialing and further their education. OHS posted another round of Early Head Start and Childcare Partnership funding opportunities. OHS also posted a Region 11 specific FOA to redistribute funds recaptured from

under enrollment or relinquishment in the previous year. Before the close of the fiscal year, we were also able to issue several one-time funding awards for health and safety needs that were requested by grantees.

### **Final Rule Update**

During the summer of 2019, the Federal Register was opened up for comments on a Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) on the Designation Renewal System (DRS). Within that Notice of Proposed Rule Making, there were changes proposed for three of the current seven conditions that are identified in section 1304.11 of the HSPPS. These were the Deficiency Condition, CLASS Condition, and Going Concern.

We were happy to see that COVID-19 did not significantly delay what we had earlier estimated our timeline for the issuance of that new rule. It was published on August 28, 2020. The new rule will go into effect approximately 60 days after the date of publication.

### **FY2021 Forecast**

Priorities for Region 11 have to start with engaging with tribal leadership and understanding the goals and priorities of tribal leaders for their specific communities. One thing I want to encourage folks to do, in addition to the larger tribal consultation, is that our tribal programs always communicate the specific priorities and the goals you have for your children, families, and communities in the years to come. This will help ensure the work we are doing is supporting that direction and those goals.

Funding of our programs is always going to be a huge priority for us. OHS has received our first quarter appropriation for FY21 through a continuing resolution. This continuing resolution is through December 11, 2020. Grantees who are funded in the first quarter of the fiscal year, specifically November, December, January, and February will be funded 50% of their annual grant rather than the full amount upfront. The remaining balance will be funded once our remaining appropriation is issued by congress for FY21.

Over the summer, our team facilitated our regional needs assessment and began to pull different data sources that we will look at as ongoing and reliable. Those included past year tribal consultation testimony, Program Information Reports (PIR), reports from our Head Start Enterprise System (HSES), monitoring reports, reports from our training and technical assistance network (T/TA), our regional needs assessments from the Region 11 HSSCO, data from our AIAN FACES data collection and the Tribal Research Center, as well as input from the National Indian Head Start Director's Association (NIHSDA). Through several weeks of data analysis, our team identified to most significant concerns and most urgent needs of tribal Head Start programs and developed our Regional priorities for FY21.

The first priority area is Health, Disabilities and Mental Health.

The second priority area is staffing. With staffing, we're referring to the challenges that programs are experiencing with high turnover and the challenges experienced with recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

The third priority area is fiscal. One concerning observation made by pulling data was we went back to the last year that was not impacted by COVID-19 because we know FY 20 and FY19 have both been impacted by COVID-19. We looked at FY18 and one thing that we noticed was out of an annual budget of approximately \$290 million we finished that year with about \$30 million unobligated or left on the table. Region 11 was able to work with a lot of those programs to retain and continue to utilize those funds through carry over, but undoubtedly a lot of programs lost, or 'left' money on the table. That's definitely a concern to us because we never want to see our programs sending any funding back.

Another thing that we observed was, we saw some of our grantees who were falling behind on audits. Falling behind on audits impacted certain grantees' eligibility for other grants, which then impacted eligibility for the Head Start Grant.

One example I will give was we saw programs who fell behind on audits and therefore they were not eligible for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) grant for meal reimbursement, which is a requirement of the Head Start grant. One thing we want to do is target how we can support any programs who are experiencing challenges or falling behind with their audits and their internal financial controls.

The fourth priority area was promoting School Readiness and Supporting Teachers. That was the systemic approach to getting kids ready for kindergarten and progressing them throughout their time with Head Start and the systemic approach that programs were taking to support teachers with ongoing growth and development so that we have the best teacher child interactions happening in every classroom and promote high quality learning experiences program wide and region wide for tribal children.

The fifth priority area is governance. This particular area was one where we saw many programs that struggled with not having effective internal communication structures between the Head Start program, the fiscal office, human resources, or other internal division to ensure the smooth delivery of services to children, families and their communities. Through monitoring we saw a high number of programs who weren't doing their regular reporting to the policy councils and governing bodies. Without these regular reports, governing bodies and tribal leadership are limited in their ability to provide effective and ongoing oversight of the Head Start grant and Head Start program.

Lastly, full enrollment is always going to remain a priority for OHS. One alarming thing that I observed in the fall of 2019 when pulling enrollment data, was that we had about 48% of our grantees nationally that were under enrolled by four or more months. We really want to take a targeted look at what is contributing to this. We want to identify pathways for our grantees to reduce or eliminate under enrollment and to meet what their full enrollment is. I do think a lot of that is going to start with revisiting what the current unmet need in the community is to make sure that your Head Start program or Early Head Start Program is aligned to meet those needs.

## **Resources**

Lastly, I do want to encourage our grantee to keep in close contact with your Program Specialists and Grant Specialists assigned to your programs. By ensuring they are kept in the loop and are informed allows them to ability to more effectively support your programs success. Also, I'll refer folks to Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website. We do have a specific page for COVID-19. This page is updated regularly, and I do want to encourage folks to check this from time to time just to ensure that you have the most updated information, guidance, and support. Thank you.

## **Tribal Leader Testimony**

**Shane Drift,  
Councilmember  
Bois Forte Tribal Council**

- Head Start program has limited the number of children in each classroom to 10 children. We are rotating children and families from center based to distance learning.

- One challenge we're experiencing is limited space
- Local economy has been impacted as the tribe only operates 1 casino.
- The casino is operating at half capacity.
- Our hotel is operating at around 15% of what it normally would be doing.
- Winter is typically slower so that will also impact the tribe's economy in the months to come.
- Our local convenience store was impacted by the virus and we're working hard to keep it open and operating as it is our only resource for families in that community.
- Some of the additional funding for COVID that are in discussion may also come with additional new rules and policies that will create more hurdles as we try utilize those funds within grant periods.
- Our Head Start staff have done a good job in following pandemic guidelines. Last program year we did have to shut down for the best interest of the safety of children, staff, and the community.

**Jessica Black,  
Board President  
Fairbanks Native Association**

- I love Head Start and it's something I firmly believe in. My daughter was in the Early Head Start. When I was pregnant I also received home based services. Head Start has provided a strong foundation from which she can build her life.
- I had the opportunity to attend consultation last year and learned a lot from other tribal leaders and learned that we share many challenges while also being unique in where we come from and our experiences.
- I was elected to board president last year and in this capacity, I have had to privilege to come to understand more about Head Start and support their goals and objectives with School Readiness.
- As an educator and researcher myself I love the philosophy of Head Start which is to provide at-risk children a head start to be successful as lifelong learners. I received both my master's and PhD in social work and learning a lot about Head Start. And just seeing it in action has been really inspiring.
- As tribal leaders we want to see the results from tribal consultations. We want our concerns to be heard and acted upon in a meaningful way as stated in the Act. And we like to have feedback and solutions to the concerns that all Alaska Head Start programs are faced with.
- While our primary focus is to share experiences on the impacts of COVID-19, I also wants to state that I firmly support past remarks on poverty guidelines used to determine income eligibility for participation in Head Start and Early Head Start programs. These guidelines do not reflect actual costs of living for Alaska residents.
- Teacher qualification is another area that we struggle with year after year. At Fairbanks Native Association we struggle with recruiting and retaining teaching staff that meet the mandated requirements in the Head Start Performance Standards. We do understand and respect the importance of maintaining highly qualified staff, but it's a challenge when we are not adequately funded to pay competitive wages for those teachers holding bachelor's degrees. We have a very limited pool of applicants to hire from and we continue to compete with the school district once teachers achieve their qualifications. So, schools across the nation have been shutting down and our families are faced with the difficult decision of quitting their jobs to educate. After the school district made the decision to operate schools remotely, we lost nine teaching staff in less than six weeks.

- And I would say that we provide a lot of training to our staff and that's a consistent feedback we get from our employees is they really appreciate the different levels of training we provide. But then once we train a lot of our teachers, they do move on.
- In regard to COVID I want to start by thanking the OHS for the additional COVID funding when the pandemic first began. The money has been really helpful in assisting families we serve, with food and activity packs. We were able to supply our teaching staff with necessary technology to provide remote services.
- Because of COVID, our children have not had the opportunity to take part in classroom learning, socializing with friends and teachers since March.
- With current distance learning approaches, child wellness checks and immunizations are a challenge. Getting appointments scheduled and getting children to clinics has been difficult.
- Parents and families who worked and went to school are now themselves doing distance learning or working from home while trying to care for their children. Limited access to internet has made this increasingly difficult for families.
- Parents and families are also experiencing anxiety around the health of their children, access to healthcare, the educational progression of their children, and family income and stability.
- COVID has also impacted the way our families and community members support one another as social distancing protocols have prevented gatherings.
- Many of these anxieties and worries are shared by our staff. Staff are experiencing anxieties around returning to work and risks to their own health and the health of their own households and families. Staff struggle with attempting to meet the high needs of families while also caring for their own families.
- Our program received funds for the purchase of a new facility in 2016 and then funding for facility renovations and the construction of an addition to the infant toddler wing, that is expected to be completed in December of this year. Our classrooms have been designed specifically for infants, toddlers and preschool age children with Alaska native culture represented in the environment. They are enriching, clean and safe.
- We request that the OHS, continue to be flexible regarding enrollment and service delivery models, during the COVID-19 pandemic
- We would recommend that the OHS continue to offer funding opportunities to ensure high quality facilities for Head Start children and families in Alaska. And with our short construction season, just because our spring, summer is so short and the many challenges that agencies experience related to the availability of building materials and equipment in Alaska; capital funds to be allocated separately from the five-year grants cycle of base funding.
- In closing, I just want to share a couple of really cool things we've done to remain connected to our children and families. We have weekly virtual and group Zoom connections with our children and families, and there's also been drive by parades from teachers to students. So, I think that... I wanted to end on a good note because I think we deeply care for our children and families. And Fairbanks, even though it's a city is a really small community. Everybody knows each other.
- From my experience as a Head Start parent I can say we really rely on the teachers and staff and other parents as a community to embrace, love, and care for our children and the program staff are doing a really good job.
- The program is providing food and activity packs when we can and remaining connected. Children have a positive experience and even after they transition will tell you they went to FNA Head Start.
- So, I'll just stop there and say, thank you very much.

**Virginia Chavez,**

**Tribal Council  
Pueblo of Zuni**

- My name is Virginia Chavez. I am Head Councilwoman for the Pueblo of Zuni, in Zuni New Mexico, glad to be here with all of you, and I'm glad to be part of this tribal consultation.
- We have about over 12,000 enrolled members in Zuni. A lot of our people live elsewhere like in Albuquerque or in other cities. So, but we do have about maybe 10,000 people who actually live in our community.
- So, we have, oh, I can't remember the exact number, about 300 or maybe even a little less Head Start children in our Head Start program. Of course, our tribal leaders support our Head Start program 100%. We're thankful for the funding that we received to fund the education of our Head Start children.
- So, during this pandemic, it has been challenges, all of us have faced. One of the things that of course, was our number one setback was the internet connectivity. We are remote, we are about maybe 45 miles away from the nearest city. So, our internet capability in our Pueblo isn't always the best
- So, I know our Head Start staff did as much as they could to still stay in touch with our Head Start children and they're working with them remotely, virtually. So, we're thankful for that.
- Other things that I guess I could say that we have in Zuni that we as others have said, is the income eligibility. At times we don't have enough children enrolled in our Head Start program. So, we don't meet that number, that threshold to keep our Head Start children. That way we can get more children eligible to be a part of the Head Start program.
- But another factor that we have is that the only program that we had in our Pueblo, for the three- or four-year-olds, was our Zuni Head Start program. But the Zuni public school district, within the last five years, are offering a program for the three and four-year-olds too.
- So, we appreciate any kind of training that you could provide to our Head Start teachers and I'm grateful for the increase in the qualifications of our teachers. I know a lot of parents want that for their children to have a qualified teacher, teaching their children. So, I'm thankful for that and we're grateful for that, and even our own Head Start teachers in Zuni appreciate that. And they, it boosts their self-esteem and their capabilities. we also have our own local college in Zuni, where we have programs that we work with other universities that we work with. So, our Head Start program, the teachers were able to attend online classes through our college, through to the Northern Arizona university.
- So, that's all that can come to my mind, but I can turn this over to the next person. Thank you.

**Jeanie Christopher,  
Head Start Director  
Confederated Salish And Kootenai Tribes**

- Okay, good morning or afternoon, wherever you are. I will introduce myself and that will not take very much time. I began work in Head Start as a Head Start parent and I drank the Kool-Aid. So, it was really easy for me and really rewarding for me to be in Head Start at the very first day when I was there, I was told, okay, you have to take classes because you have to know what you're doing. And so, having that education built into the program has been since the first day with me. And I have tried to really foster that among our staff during the 7 years I've been here.
- I just want to talk about a few things. One of them is that ordinarily, pre-COVID we've had waiting lists for as many children on the waiting list, as we've been able to provide services to. And this year it's just not been the same. We've had public schools establish preschools. And in our State, kindergarten is not mandatory, but the public schools were offered funding for



preschools and they just jumped right on it. So, we have public schools that, this year we are competing with for children.

- We had approximately 16 to 19 people not return this fall. And even though we've had additional staff by other funding sources, we've had grandparents in our program, and we've had a special services staff in our program. We've tried in every way to make our sites as safe as possible.
- I would just like to say that in terms of the funding, I am really disappointed in the fact that the prices for things to be safe has gone up so much. Everything costs more. I signed an approval on getting more gloves today. And several months ago, the gloves were \$15 a box, and now they're \$30 a box, for gloves. But everything costs more, food costs more, we've had to purchase a lot of other supplies to reassure our staff that they will be safe.
- We spent a lot of time this summer revising our policies and procedures. And we did our pre-service virtually. None of that is as good as in-person. And I understand that it's something that we have to do now, but it's ... I'm concerned about the relationships we have with families. I'm concerned about gaining their trust, and I'm concerned about doing the right thing.
- So, kids need transportation and if you can only fit seven children on a bus because of social distancing, you still have other children to pick up. You still have to do things to make that bus ride safe. I don't know about all of you, but we have a lot of children being raised in the foster care system.
- We have a lot of children being raised by grandparents and even some great grandparents. In the past, we had an 83 year old great-grandparent picking up her grandchild, her great, great-grandchild and she had a heart attack in the parking lot. So, we're trying to deal with lots of those kinds of issues, keeping people safe this year.
- Continuing our relationships with families that have returned and building new relationships with our new families. We had a summer program this year and we did it virtually and it wasn't the most successful. It just wasn't.
- We have now a Facebook page, so that we can communicate with families better. We do lots of Zoom meetings, and I really find that people are suffering from Zoom fatigue.
- Another thing that has happened is that every week it seems like we get a resignation from some staff member. So, between people not returning, due to COVID and the resignations; I'm really concerned about the quality of our program. Because that means we start the training cycle well, the training cycle never ends, but a lot of people are entering that training cycle and it just makes it more difficult
- Early on our tribe had a shelter in place and they had a shelter in place I believe when one or two people locally contracted COVID and now we have a lot more people every week. Today, I got an email that the tribal property and supply was going to be closed because an employee there had COVID. So it is affecting lots of our families. And we are back to work. A lot of people say to me, it's too bad we didn't wait to do shelter in place, but there's so much unknown about COVID that we just couldn't have guessed that, and people are afraid. They're concerned, they don't want to pass anything on, and they don't want to contract that COVID. It's not developmentally appropriate to do all those things virtually. There's no way we can keep preschoolers and infants and toddlers. We can't seclude them enough to keep them totally safe. It's not appropriate. They have to see people talk. They have to look at your expressions. I realized now, by having this face mask on and others in my organization, in their face mask, how much I read lips and how much I used to get from seeing people's expressions.
- So, just that alone has really affected us. I'd like to thank you for your continued support and the work that you do on behalf of our program and every other program in the nation. I appreciate the flexibility, because I know that people who are getting sick or who are afraid of getting sick. I know them by name. They're in my community. I see them wherever I go. And I'm one of them. So, I just want to thank you for working with us. And also, I want to thank the tribal council. The tribal council provides a lot of support for us. They pay our electric bill, they pay the garbage,

they pay for a lot of things and had we not had that, our program would look really different. So, I want to thank you and wish you well and let you know that we appreciate you.

**Nigel Lawrence,  
Tribal Council Secretary/Director of Marion Forsman-Boushie Early Learning Center  
Suquamish Indian Tribe of the Port Madison Reservation**

- My name is Nigel Lawrence. I'm the tribal council secretary for the Squamish tribe. Also, I'm the director of our Marion Forsman-Boushie Early Learning Center where we have Head Start and Early Head Start. I like to say Washington state is around us. We were here before Washington, right?
- Just like all you guys. I don't like to say I'm in Washington state, but just to give you an idea we're across the water from Seattle. Seattle is Archie. like to thank the Alaskan tribes and first nations corporations. I'd like to thank the Alaskans for letting us join your consultation.
- First of all, I want to agree with everything our other tribal leaders have said. All of those issues affect us in similar ways. So add that to my testimony, what they said.
- I guess my two biggest... One of my biggest questions are, I would like to figure out a way for a tribal Early Head Start, Head Start providers, to be able to go to a 100% over income. I know going up to 49% is a big increase from 10% for non-tribal facilities. But as you guys know, it's only \$26,200 for a family of four, according to the federal poverty limit. Which means only one parent working at \$12.59 an hour and \$12:60 puts you over a 100% of the federal poverty limit for a family of four. My other request is that all tribal children be considered categorically eligible regardless of income. And that part, I think takes an act of Congress. And I wonder if it's within obviously Head Start's power to just change the percentage up to a 100% of the kids can be over income for tribal facilities.
- The next thing is, we also are heavily supported by our tribal businesses which are of course heavily impacted by COVID right now.
- One of the things I understood about the CARES act, and you guys probably understand this way better than me, our businesses weren't allowed to use loss of revenue as an expense. Which didn't make any sense to me because everything is loss of revenue. That's the biggest impact.
- I mean, yes, it costs money for PPE and it cost money for all these other things, but those would be paid for out of revenue normally. And so with those dwindling dollars our early learning center is less supported by government businesses.
- And so that relates to my next one is I have a big question about, is there a Head Start or Early Head Start rate per child?
- You guys all have a lot more experience with this than me. My predecessors, a couple of predecessors ago went up to 1,020 hours for Head Start and Early Head Start, a decade ago, forever ago. Because we went to a 1,020 hours a long, long time ago. We are not eligible for the last round, or I don't know, maybe in the previous round of duration funds. We already were at 1,020. And therefore, we couldn't even apply for duration funds.
- We were able for Early Head Start because Early Head Start was at 1,020 hours that we were offering, and the duration grant was to go up to 1,380. I was a little overwhelmed with that application process. And there wasn't a... Again, I still feel like, no matter how long I'm doing this, I feel like I'm new at it.
- I asked for cameras and I got everything I asked for. I feel like I didn't ask for enough. I should have asked for another nurse. I should have asked for more support staff. There are all these extra things that happen when you increase services that I couldn't predict.

- There's just too much happening and not enough people here to cover it all. And then throw in the pandemic and burnout and fatigue and all of that going on. We are also constantly understaffed because of turnover.
- I guess, the way that we were able to hit 1,020 hours for all these years is because of the tribe heavily subsidized Head Start. It feels like also we have a... CCDF is helping to pay for us to get to 1,020 hours, Childcare Development Fund, because we have wraparound childcare in the same rooms that we have Head Start and Early Head Start.
- So as a tribal council person, I'm looking at this thinking, if I need to cut some expenses somewhere, I should stop how much paying tribal hard dollars paying to support this Head Start 1,020 hours. If they're not compensating me enough for it. And I hate to do that as an EOC director. I'm like, "No, no, no, don't cut my funding." So I'm both. I got to wear both hats, right?
- But it's hard for me as a council person, not know that I think we're being underfunded. That we voluntarily, and that was a mistake on our part, right? No good deed. And so if you guys can answer that question for me and satisfy that curiosity that I have, that would be awesome, and I hope I'm wrong.
- Otherwise, I would want to say, the tribe might have to cut our funding to Head Start rooms and I guess next round out would make us eligible to apply for duration again. I think that's all I have in there. That's all that I have notes about. And again, I agree with everything everybody else said.
- So Indian children, categorically eligible, or can we go up to 100% of children be over income? And is there a rate per child? Am I being paid the right amount for offering 1,020 hours for child Head Start hours? Thanks everybody.

**James Baca,  
Lt. Governor  
Pueblo of Santa Clara**

- So good afternoon. Good morning. Depending on what part of the country you're in right now. My name is James Baca. I currently serve as the Lieutenant governor for the Pueblo of Santa Clara. And I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak today.
- I apologize, last week we all weren't able to make the meeting as we had for the Southwest area. We were in a tribal council meeting and so we couldn't get away from that, unfortunately. So normally Governor Michael Chavarria would be a part of this, but he sends his apologies and is he's unable to make it as he has been scheduled for a different meeting as well. So he's asked me to speak on behalf of the Pueblo of Santa Clara. The Pueblo of Santa Clara will also provide you some written testimony, but what we're going to go ahead and do is I'll go ahead and read off what we have as far as our testimony is concerned today. Okay. Thank you.
- So some of the first things that I'm going to go ahead and speak of are the COVID-19 impacts. Number one, is the economic trauma to native American children and families due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic disparities for families in native American communities due to the COVID-19 pandemic continue to negatively influence the health and wellbeing of children and adults as families manage through job losses across the country.
- Educational divides continue to impact the Head Start programs ability to recruit native American children due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The educational divides for children and native American preschool programs across the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic continue to influence the academic, cognitive, social, emotional learning children require for school and life skill readiness.

- Requiring a request for a noncompetitive five-year grant. Due to the detrimental impacts in the Santa Clara of Pueblo community. We request to ensure our children's educational needs are respectively taken care of in a meaningful and beneficial ways.
- The strength of our future rests in our new leadership that our next generation of children will contribute to us substantially. We must be consistent with the academic and fiducial resources to support our children, families, and community, accordingly.
- Tribal early childhood initiatives. What are the factors that make it easier to coordinate across early childhood programs and initiatives and develop stronger early childhood systems in tribal communities? Common goals, executive level support and understanding communication, collaboration, community support and financial stability.
- So what do we have here at the public Santa Clara as far as our resources are concerned? We have economic enterprises. We have language speakers, we have families and children, dual language program, home visits, Head Start, our community school alongside our face program, integration of our elders and communication.
- But what do we need here in the Pueblo? We need efficient data systems, community awareness of our services, early childhood education provided to our parents and community members, early childhood collaboration, early childhood pipeline, MOU with outside resources, health and wellness classes, and financial literacy training for families.
- So what makes it difficult to coordinate across programs and initiatives in tribal communities? Eligibility requirements for Native American children enrolled in the Head Start program. As just spoken about just a few minutes ago. Differing educational goals amongst the entities and issues with finances.
- So just to build up on that a little bit more. The current eligibility for Native American children entering into the Head Start programs are evaluated based on the requirements such as current eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and attendance (ERSEA).
- The diversity mandate and outlined in the 2016 OHS performance standards, 1302 Subpart B Head Start 2019. The ERSEA requirements do not take into consideration the generational impacts of poverty and how the current eligibility policies frame the exclusions of some Native American children based on their family economic status.
- Current research and OHS policies directly include high quality early childhood education as a strong indicator for changing the trajectory of minority children that fall behind academically generation after generation.
- An important consideration to alleviate continued educational gaps is to eliminate the eligibility barriers defined by family socio economic status in assumption. Native American children, excuse me. Equality in early childhood education is dependent upon the assumption that all children of color come from families to share the same starting point, including the literacy of economic and educational capacities.
- Researching this very topic has found that just because families experienced the same economic conditions, race and culture are experienced differently in minority families. What the OHS mandate does not consider is that even through a mandatory family earning is at or above the poverty level guidelines. This does not mean that they're able to significantly contribute enough to reverse the general outflow influences of poverty in the families of the children's defense fund of 2012. Excuse me.
- It is therefore concluded that is an important step to take towards eliminating academic inequalities that contribute to general relational poverty by reevaluating the ERSEA guidelines and removing the poverty levels based on enrollment so that all children of marginal families, especially Native American children, easier access to equitable early childhood education in Head Start programs.
- So all Native American children of color whose families choose to participate in the Head Start program should be welcomed and served under the Head Start model. Because generational

poverty does not begin and end with one generation. Generational poverty is systematic in the policies and framework of our citizenship in America.

- Generational divides in education, economics in America continue to impact each generation. And based on historical and current research. Breaking the cycle of poverty begins with high quality and equitable early education. Children's defense fund, no matter what a family's current economic situation may be in, until generational poverty is eliminated, the current mandates and policies will continue to devalue the early educational prospects of Native American children in the country.
- It is our responsibility as a community here at the Pueblo of Santa Clara to honor the promise that America cherishes. Freedom and education for all. Minority families in America, generationally experience numerous obstacles including educational divides, educational or economic disparities, healthcare shortfalls and homelessness. All of these factors are variables in much of the historical and current research OHS uses to mitigate the factors, to mitigate the influences of poverty.
- What we need to do is primarily considered the communities that we raise our children in because the educational system, which are in place will determine the quality of experiences children will receive.
- So how do we consider the research to guide our questions and develop strategic plans to strengthen the Head Start eligibility requirements must be re-evaluated? Are the communities in every single history located serving Native American children, meeting the expectations for how we value and contribute high quality learning opportunities for all Native American children? What our children view and experience inside and outside of the preschool classroom, will construct and weighs heavily on the long-term outcomes.
- One of the most important solutions in mitigating the influences of poverty in Native American and marginalized communities is through high quality early childhood education. This statement is demonstrated through significant research conducted through and about the OHS program, such as the Office of Early Head Start, facts and data.
- The Head Start model promotes early childhood education through access to early quality and programs and efforts to change the trajectory of children and families experiencing poverty.
- Head Start programs have been found to reflect positive outcomes, especially in relation to increasing preschool age children literacy and learning gains prior to entering kindergarten. Critical claims was the heart in a Risely 2000 study, which indicated that by the time a child who is three years old in minority and from a low socio economic status family, the child will know 300 fewer words compared to a child who is three years of age from a family who is not minority and of high socio economic status family.
- The study noted that between 86 and 98% of the children's vocabulary was based on the language and quality of vocabulary of their parents. If we agreed to the research guidelines, our understanding for how to remove barriers that suppress literacy enhancing and long life outcomes for children and families, then let's begin with the authentic dialogue and eliminate the perimeters around the ERSEA.
- If poverty impacts the learning and lifelong outcomes of children and families generally, then OHS should open a new dialogue and reconsider how ERSEA is implemented to move policy and mandates to align with current research. Adamule, sorry, if I pronounced that wrong, and Hogan in their research stated, data shows that changing trajectory for the preschool to prison to pipeline is reflected in high quality, early learning environments and that of culturally relevant and supportive.
- The research conducted by experts in the field of early childhood education from the beginning of Head Start, proposed equality, early education for children who need it most minority poor, and children diagnosed as disabled.

- Let's review policies and mandates with clear perspective and be honest about who they are served. Policy changes are needed to support early child education in the trust sense and allow children who need the most opportunities to inequitable education when they need it most during the formative years of their development are not ignored and vetted out of the OHS model.
- So the mission and vision of many entities differ greatly in regard to early childhood education. Generalizing the mission of education entities, Santa Clara of Pueblo seeks to build leaders through an excellent and relevant education. The state of New Mexico is currently occupied with equality and sufficiency and the federal government programs of the OHS and the Bureau of Indian affairs are concerned with moving out of poverty and self-determination, respectively.
- So finances are also a major contention. This ranges from entities sustaining various financial calculators, to timeliness, to intergovernmental agreements, to length of project periods, to administrative burdens. I'll continue to request and suggestion of tribal governance was multi-year funding agreements to operate projects.
- This was a sharp contrast to multi-year funding agreements at the federal level for education and single year agreements. At the state level. The planning capabilities are expanded, and the administrative burdens decreased with multi-year funding agreements.
- So what could the federal government do to make coordination and systems building easier? I.e. Technical Assistance, TA, monitoring your funding to identify positive characteristics of inter-governmental policies, which has benefited tribal nations in regards to education or representation required communications, tribal consultation, local control using financial authority, shared accountability, multi-year funding agreements and cultural relevant curriculum. A non-policy, but integral characteristic of successful information that was identified at executive level support.
- So representation, political representation, and the activity of making citizens, voices up opinions and perspectives present in public policy, making processes. Communications, tribal consultation. Consultation should be part of mutual effort to coordinate and cooperate in good faith. Tribal consultations of all regular consultations on a case by case consultation as the need arises. Excuse me.
- Local control. The concept of local control is grounded in philosophy of governmental promises on the behalf of the individual institution closest to the student and most knowledgeable about the school and the most invested in the welfare and success of the educators. The students and the community. They are best suited to make important decisions about the operation leadership, staffing, academics, and teaching, and overall improvement.
- Accountability. Political accountability refers to the responsibility or obligation of governmental officials to act in the best interest of society or face consequences. Public officials should be held responsible for their actions, legal accountability concerning the mechanisms by which public officials can be held liable for their actions.
- Culturally relevant curriculum. One of the most significant areas, we talk about relevance and education for our children is to have language, culture, and history of part of their curriculum. So that, that education isn't something that is separated from our existence in our communities.
- So how has COVID 19 impacted the ability to provide services to our children? Students with special needs are being highly impacted due to the disruption in services and lack of face to face interaction with their teachers, their counselors, and their support staff. Families with medical conditions and the economic challenges are being compounded, increasing stress and behavioral issues.
- Children are being shuffled between households to meet the demands of childcare due to parents working, possibly increasing the virus spread. The lack of social interaction is impacting the social emotional wellbeing of our children in their critical development years.
- What other resources about the pandemic would have been helpful to communities to mitigate the impact? Emergency infrastructural funding to establish broadband capabilities for tele education

to ensure children continue to achieve academically through the crisis. Without this, our community simply does not have the capability or the capacity to implement distance learning.

- Our schools face the heart wrenching choice of exposing our children to the risk in the classroom or forgoing teacher led education during the school closures. The extension of federal employee health benefits access to tribally operated grad schools. Tribally operated grant schools operate within the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) system pursuant to public law 10297 due to the technical oversight of the legislative drafting process. Only BIE operated schools are currently able to participate in the federal employee health benefits program. While tribally operated schools cannot.
- This puts tremendous strain on our tribal schools, as the cost of providing health insurance for staff members can total over a million dollars a year. Now more than ever, is it essential that all staff have equitable access to essential health care coverage to free up funding through for COVID response activities. A simple zero cost one-line fixed in the Indian health care improvement act would achieve this results and just interdepartmental funding as well.
- In the future. What discussions will need to occur, make sure and communities are prepared in the event of a healthcare crisis or any type of natural disasters? Equality. The Pueblo of Santa Clara has successfully operated a Head Start program for several decades and has commenced home-based early education services in recent years.
- Santa Clara Pueblo Early Head Start program is the only EHS site in the region of Northern New Mexico. While the goal of Head Start is to move families out of poverty. This definition is not adequate to meet conditional needs for educational equality and trust responsibility of the federal government to the Pueblos of New Mexico.
- While the federal government continues to push for equality, this does not address the systematic oppression of Native Americans through federal policy.
- Utilizing the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, living wage calculator. We've also included that with our written testimony. A huge disparity between poverty and living wages are illustrated while a poverty wage for single parent with a single child is \$7.91 an hour. The living wage for the same family is nearly three times the amount at \$23.75 per hour. This is more a minimum wage and then New Mexico still... while the minimum wage still remains in New Mexico at \$7.50 cents an hour.
- So with that, I thank you. I appreciate you giving us the time here at the Pueblo of Santa Clara to give us our testimony today and with that.

**Martha Garcia,**  
**School Board Member**  
**Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc.**

- Thank you very much. My name is Garcia. I'm a member on the Ramah Navajo School Board. I'm the liaison to the Ramah Navajo Head Start. And I sit on the policy council as an ex officio member and authorized to speak today. We are located in New Mexico for those tribal leaders that are listening in hello, to all of you and also to the staff. I just want to express our appreciation for being able to present a testimony today. We are a small group of native people, a member of the Navajo Nation, but separate geographically, and also have been able to provide programs to our community since the 1970s. I know Head Start has been an existence out here since the late 60s, and along the way, Navajo School Board was able to get direct services from the national level of Head Start and we have grown in many ways.
- And even though we are faced with some challenges during this pandemic time, we have moved forward. We were very fortunate as a Ramah Navajo School Board to have able to bring broadband into the community in whatever way possible. It just so happens that when the

pandemic came in, we had a company that was authorized to go ahead and implement the broadband, the internet service to our community including students in our K-12 school and Head Start. Students are able to access the internet and have direct instruction from teachers.

- The program has been able to do some in person instruction at the home of families but outside. Children have taken to the virtual learning and have adapted. Food is still being provided also.
- Ramah Navajo School Board is in our 50<sup>th</sup> year of operating. We started from virtually nothing. Some services are still provided through contracts and grants with the federal government such as health, social services, higher education, and Head Start. Through the Ramah Navajo School Board children are learning with the inclusion of their culture and language.
- Many of our families are now primarily English speaking but do recognize the importance of immersing our children in the Navajo language. To improve our implementation of this additional funding is needed. Additionally, with this being our 50<sup>th</sup> year of operations, facilities are showing age including the modular where Head Start services are provided. They are over 30 years old now and require more and more maintenance. Currently we have to move children from building to building even just to use the bathroom and with us being at over 7,200 feet it can make it difficult. We hope to work with Head Start on a proposal for a facility. Currently our other facilities are being renovated with funds from the BIE and DFMC.
- The other thing that we are faced with here in New Mexico is the fact that we are receiving funds through the Head Start program from the national level. And our enrollment has been undermined at this point in time by the state of New Mexico, who without consulting the tribes and the Pueblos here in New Mexico initiated a pre K program into their public school. So, a number of our students are being channeled through that now by families, and our enrollment is lower than normal than what it would have been if those additional preschool programs were not added. There was no question. There was no survey that was done to see if another different preschool was needed but State just went ahead and did that.
- And I agree with all the issues that other tribes have brought up. The transportation issue is a major one here within our program. We run the buses on the same route as the K-12 buses, but it's at a different time, and we are faced with unimproved roads to many of the homes where we have to pick up our students. Improving roads is one thing we hope to work with transportation departments at the state and national levels on.
- I noticed that in the past that the mental health service has been brought up and that needs to be incorporated into the overall Head Start program so that they are available and that they are here. We are doing very well as far as working with our special needs students, but our service is that we have to receive away from our area. We are currently 60 miles from any of the nearest town. Our tribal government sits 90 miles away. And then if we're going to get services, then it's about 130 miles away to get those specialized services into our community, and if we get those services and keep them here, it would be very, very beneficial to our students that need these services at this point in time.
- So, I would like to request that you honor our concerns and take these into consideration and work with us so that we can move forward. We at Ramah Navajo School Board and the policy council have been working hand in hand, many times regulations and how things need to be done at different levels. But we have come together and have begun to work as much as we can. I'm proud to say that we have hired a super intendent for the entire operation within our community under the Ramah Navajo School Board. She is former Head Start, and she has been very supportive of the program that it's been run under her shop. So, I like to say thank you to giving us the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Ramah Navajo Head Start program, and we want to continue to work with our families because they are the first one that have been teachers, and they're full time teachers now that we're doing virtual learning with their children, and we face a lot of the same issues that we have about the pandemic, and health-related problems that we see within our community.



- We are fortunate to have a health center here on site and be able to catch whenever there's a positive case that comes up and keeping it as low as possible. It's been difficult for us to do that. A lot of our time has been focused on how to address the pandemic that we have been seeing here, not only with health-related, but it impacts many other areas, including the education of our children. And we will continue to do the best things possible, and see, for us, I don't know if this is going to be the norm of getting together and no longer sitting together in a face to face type meeting, but we're learning and that we need to continue to go forward and involve everyone from the central level to the Head Start level, the staff, to the governing body, and to the parents and community members to help us make appropriate decisions that would be very beneficial. And yes, we know that Head Start has made a difference in the lives of many of our people in the community, because it's been in existence for so long. Our children now are benefiting. They're probably grandparents now, that were there in the late 60's, and now they have children and grandchildren that are attending Head Start. So, I thank you for this opportunity to allow me to speak today. Thank you.

**MaryEllen Fritz,**  
**Head Start Director**  
**Chugachmiut Head Start**

- Hello. Good morning. Good afternoon. I'm tired. Well, I'm so impressed. You're able to act so quickly. It takes a while to get some of our things in place from time to time. And this was one of those. So, just like a lot of people are going to squeak under the doors of heaven, here I am to talk about squeaking under the doors of the Tribal Consultations. I wanted to thank you, Todd, and Ann, and Trevondia, Delroy, the OHS, the tribal leaders on this call, the friends of Head Start, and those at this meeting. These meetings are so important, and I wanted to share with you some of the amazing things that have been happening, even though this pandemic has taken a toll and created lots of ways for us to redo a lot of our processes.
- There's been good things that have happened too. But before I go into some of those things, I wanted to share how our partnership, how Todd, you at the helm and Trevondia just right by our side, helping families with real life things. So, regulations are there and learning outcomes are very vital, but there's also a lot of family services needs right now because of the changes brought on by this pandemic. Trevondia has been stellar working with us as we've come against problem after problem that we're not expected, even with your best planning, you're expecting this to happen. Such as we had a family move back to Nanwalek, which is a village across from Homer off of the road system. The only way you can get there is by a tiny little plane, or if the tide is right, you can take a barge that can dock up to the ground, but a family had moved back because they had lost their job in Homer.
- And when they came back, there was such a severe housing shortage in Homer. They were living in a shed with no electricity, no heat, no water, and no plumbing. No one knew this except for when our Head Start teacher went to their house to help with their application and do the enrollment interview. Had we not had that home visit, this family would be in 20 degree weather with no heat, no food, no electricity, and no way to store things in a refrigerator. That's how vital Head Start is for our tribal communities because this family was proud and did not want to ask for the help that they needed, but our wonderful trained staff with a loving way helped them get the help that they need. They don't have the housing they want right now, but we were able to help with the other shortages and problems that they had had that we never would have known without this home visit.
- And so, our main goal is safe and healthy communities. And, as I said with Trevondia has been so much on the email and phone with us because, there are a lot of things that happened with

COVID that we did not expect. It's not in any community assessment that's up to date right now because things are happening so fast, but like the plane stopped flying. And the only way to get food to our communities are, the planes bringing the supplies there. And so, our communities were impacted by not having the food and supplies that they needed to keep their families safe and not hungry. So, we were really blessed to be able to have the flexibility with both the COVID funding and our regular funding to stop what we were doing, to be able to meet immediate needs of families not living in shacks, and not having food, and to connect with the social services and resources, which by the way, couldn't get out to our communities because there's a travel ban because of the high levels of COVID in Homer, which is the hub to get to our communities.

- So, we were working together to help each family. I wanted to let you know that Phyllis gave me the authorization. I knew Phyllis would be here if she could, if I was able to help her make that happen. But I wanted to reiterate it's the flexibility of the funding and the OHS's forward thinking of getting that money out so quickly, that really helped prevent a lot of tragedies in our really high impoverished community. I wanted to also share that Trevondia...
- I wanted to also share that Trevondia worked with us so much with our Nan Walcki playground. And right now, we got to the place where we had a contract in place and the money was going to be expended well on time and then COVID happened and none of the contractors could travel to the community. So of course then the playground couldn't be put in place. Some people might think, well, it's a playground, that can happen in a few years. Well, Trevondia has been to Nan Wallicki and with breakup and wind and rain and snow, there is like six inches of mud and muck everywhere. You can't play and stuff like that. And so the playground that we had put together is just ingenious. It's on a wooden deck. It's up out of all of that stuff. It has a fence, so the dogs don't make it unsanitary. It's a big thing for the health and safety of the kids. And so we were really happy that we were able to work with the OHS to give us an extension so we can finally put that in place when COVID is over.
- We also wanted to share that we need to be careful and work together as COVID extends, because we're seeing a lot of depression in our communities. Families who are not teachers but trying to help their older children go online with their schoolwork and families who have lost their jobs and their livelihoods. And we'll keep our program specialist, whoever that is, updated as we move forward. Be prepared. If it's happening here, it's probably going to happen all over. We need to take a look at how we as service agencies are helping that, which is probably going to grow bigger than any of us are prepared for.
- We spent an hour talking with staff about ways to look for depression. When families are opting out of home visits, is it because they're overwhelmed with the over kids in school or are they sinking into alcoholism or hurting themselves? So we are working closely with our mental health clinicians, providing opportunities via Zoom, and just teaching our staff how to look out for families to see if there's a way we can provide assistance before things get too bad. So as service providers and you as national leaders, let's make sure we're looking at that as time goes by because I can just foresee this getting worse before it gets better.
- Let's see. So Mr. Lawrence brought up the income guidelines showing true poverty in Alaska. Family two, a single parent with one Head Start child would be over income if they make \$10 and 37 cents an hour with Alaska's current poverty guidelines. And a gallon of milk cost six to \$8 in the winter. So you can see how those poverty disparities are in place. And I really want to work with Northwest in our region to address our legislators, to make sure that tribes have the flexibility to create their own eligibility guidelines as long as families most in need receive those services.
- We must make sure that we have good communication with our Program Specialist to make sure we're meeting these changing needs. We really just wanted to share some amazing things that have happened. Some of our families that had not been approachable or just held Head Start at arm's length, we've developed really close relationships with them because of this pandemic.

We're really able to help them gain a sense of being in control of their family's lives and to make good choices and step out of other things that could keep their families in not a good place. So we wanted to acknowledge that. Through Head Start, we're able to develop those relationships and help these families to succeed.

- So we're looking forward to working together and as life throws things in our path that we know that we can link arms and just work hard to make sure our kids have what they need. Thank you to the OHS. You've always been approachable and quick to respond and we're very grateful.

## **Office of Head Start (OHS) Remarks and Response to Testimony:**

### **Service Implementation and Pandemic Response**

The OHS is encouraged to hear about the amazing innovations grantees have implemented in 2020 to continue to support families most in need. From ensuring children still received meals, to identifying family needs around housing and basic necessities, Head Start programs have worked tirelessly to ensure the basic needs of families are met and children are mentally, physically, socially and emotionally in environments that support their ability to learn. 2020 has required programs to pivot, assess the impacts of COVID-19 on their communities, and implement modified service delivery that supported the safety of children, families, and staff. We've also seen programs implement modified center based services this year. Programs have designed services for smaller classrooms for families who still want and need center based services, virtual services for families who prefer a virtual setting. Some programs are rotating children's in person days and virtual days to limit in person, group settings and observe social distancing best practices based on the needs of families in their communities. Head Start programs continue to demonstrate why they are such a vital part of the communities they serve.

OHS understands that all communities, especially tribes, have been impacted economically by the pandemic. COVID-19 forced everyone to pivot and with little to no planning time, assess the impacts in their communities, plan for the safest way to implement services, and implement modified service delivery. In consideration of these enormous challenges faced by programs, OHS worked to communicate programmatic and fiscal flexibilities as soon as possible through e-blast, the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website, and the Collaborating Actively in Meaningful Planning (CAMP) webinar series hosted over the summer. Additionally, we have worked with grantees to assess the impacts on current year budget and wherever possible and beneficial, to work with grantees to reallocate funding to areas most in need. Additional flexibilities were also implemented to alleviate the administrative burdens on programs when reallocation of funding was an identified need. Many of these flexibilities can be found on the COVID-19 page on the ECLKC website.

### **Income Eligibility**

Eligibility requirements for Head Start programs are established in the Head Start Act. The statutory eligibility requirements for Head Start are intentionally focused on Head Start serving the most vulnerable children and families in our nation's communities. Since eligibility requirements are statutory, the Office of Head Start (OHS) does not have authority to change these income thresholds or other eligibility requirements through regulation, but only has authority to make minimal changes to implementation.

### **Access to Internet, Broadband, and Technology necessary to implement remote service delivery**

Throughout this year, internet connectivity and access to broadband and technology necessary to support families in a virtual setting have been the most significant challenge experienced by tribal programs. Some programs have utilized E-rate funding through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to support improved availability of internet to their communities. Other programs have utilized CARES Act funding or re-budgeted annual award funds impacted by COVID-19 to acquire technological supplies necessary to support virtual service delivery. OHS encourages programs to work with Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, and T/TA to develop remedies to challenges experienced with connectivity or technology supplies which may or may not include modifying current year budgets. OHS also encourages programs to generate supplemental funding requests, often referred to as, 'one time' funding request to support costs that are not normal annual operation costs. One time funding requests are not guaranteed and are contingent upon the availability of funds and prioritized by health and safety needs.

## **Staffing**

Head Start programs have vocalized challenges experienced around the recruitment and retention of qualified staff. Many of these challenges attributed to not having qualified applicants located within communities or losing qualified staff to higher paying positions with other early childhood education programs and school districts. Staffing, and the factors mentioned above, are included in AIAN's FY21 Priorities for support for our grantees. Region 11 / AIAN is currently working with T/TA and the National Centers to develop support targeted at these factors and provide that support to AIAN grantees. Increases in funding levels are possible through competitive Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) that are published when additional funds are available to support additional children and families. OHS cannot, without a competitive process, arbitrarily increase funding levels to a Head Start grantee. Many programs have also communicated the challenges with the recruitment of qualified staff from within their communities. OHS encourages these programs to work with Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, and T/TA to explore additional recruitment methods and platforms to expand the reach of vacancy announcements. Programs are also encouraged to post their vacancies on the ECLKC website's job center. OHS also awarded 6 Tribal College and Universities and Head Start Partnership grants in September of 2020. The purpose of these grants is to increase the number of credentialed staff in AIAN programs. While these 6 Tribal Colleges and Universities have specific AIAN Head Start programs they will be partnering with, our hope is that in the future these grants may evolve into more grants with more broad impact. If and when qualified staff cannot be identified, OHS has also provided teacher waivers to programs to allow for an individual to work toward minimum credentialing requirements. To be considered for a waiver, the individual in question must have a current and valid CDA credential and currently be enrolled in coursework leading to the required credential. Teacher waivers may be granted up to but not to exceed 3 years. Waiver consideration is for Head Start only. Early Head Start teacher waivers are not available.

OHS encourages programs experiencing these challenges to work with Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, and T/TA to review current funding levels, programs designs, and explore if and where funding can be reallocated to provide more commensurate compensation to staff and prioritize high quality services to the age eligible and income eligible population that are currently unserved in their respective communities.

## **Cost per Child & Hours of Service**

There is not a standard funding level or cost per child. While certain areas and factors for implementation may produce averages, funding levels are often a result of initially requested amounts, additional community resources, and program design. Funding opportunities referred to as 'duration' were intended

to provide funding to programs who were not currently at the minimum number of hours of service per year. Increases in funding levels are possible through competitive Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) that are published when additional funds are available to support additional children and families. OHS cannot, without a competitive process, arbitrarily increase funding levels to a Head Start grantee. OHS encourages programs experiencing these challenges to work with Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, and T/TA to review current funding levels, programs designs, and explore if and where funding can be reallocated to provide more commensurate compensation to staff and prioritize high quality services to the age eligible and income eligible population in their respective communities.

### **Culturally Relevant Curriculum**

The Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) updated in 2016 now make it a requirement that Head Start programs provide educational environments that are culturally and linguistically appropriate to the communities they serve. OHS continues to work with programs, T/TA, and our National Centers to support programs with immersing Native languages and cultures in tribal classrooms to enrich learning experiences. Tribal programs continue to evolve in how language and culture is included in their curriculums from short lesson planning activities up to and including full language immersion in classrooms. School Readiness remains a core priority of the work Head Start programs do. OHS is encouraged to hear of the impacts and intentional direction programs are taking to ensure children are provided the highest quality education service possible. In addition to Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, T/TA, and our National Centers, OHS also makes available the MyPeers network where programs may connect with one another to share best practices and support one another. Additional information can be found on the ECLKC website - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-collaborative-platform-early-care-education-community>

### **Health, Disabilities, and Mental Health Services**

Services to support Health, Disabilities, and Mental health of children, families, and staff are the top concern of Head Start. OHS understands that normal health requirements including screenings, referrals and follow-up treatment have been significantly impacted by the pandemic. While these services are of the utmost importance to the children and families who need them, OHS understands that programs will experience challenges meeting timeline requirements and for some communities it is unrealistic to expect timelines to be met as they would in a normal year. Additionally, the isolation that has been necessary for some communities to keep families safe may also create additional needs for the families. Head Start staff have performed very well in continuing to provide services, checking in with families to support, and in connecting families to service providers. Virtual support has also introduced virtual mental health support from providers. OHS encourages all programs to plan on the best way to connect families and staff to support from mental health providers in a virtual setting including regular observations to support staff and referrals. In addition to Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, and T/TA staff, OHS also supports programs in this area through our Head Start State Collaboration Office. If/when challenges are experienced with identifying resources or connecting families with outside service providers please contact your Program Specialist who can bring in additional support from our State Collaboration Director, Mr. Micker Richardson.

### **Facilities**

While OHS does not receive appropriations from congress for facilities, we have in the past been able to support programs with supplementing or funding facility projects for Head Start and/or Early Head Start programs. OHS is aware that the state of facilities in tribal communities remains an area of high need and

encourages all programs who have identified renovations, purchase, or construction as a high need to work with your Program Specialist, Grant Specialist, and T/TA to generate and submit formal supplemental funding requests. Funding for facilities is not guaranteed and is contingent upon the availability of funding and the quality of applications and completed 1303 pre-award facilities checklists.

### **Additional Service Providers in Communities**

Over the last several years Head Start programs have experienced an increase in additional service providers in their communities. OHS is encouraged to see additional serviced providers being made available to families who need them and encourages Head Start programs to collaborate and coordinate with other early childhood education providers to ensure services to all children and families in the community receive high quality services to support their needs. OHS also encourages programs to conduct updated and thorough community assessments. Community assessments should evaluate factors including but not limited to current unserved age eligible and income eligible populations, their specific needs, additional service providers in the community, and design programs targeted at meeting current unmet needs of the community. Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, and T/TA teams are available to support programs with this. This may or may not include reassessing the number of families proposed to be served.

### **Resources**

OHS highly encourages all programs to remain in close contact with Program Specialist and Grant Specialists for ongoing support. Additionally, the OHS's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website includes a COVID-19 specific page. This page is regularly updated with most recent guidance and programmatic and fiscal flexibilities available to Head Start grantees. A link is included here - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/coronavirus/ohs-covid-19-updates>

Additionally, one resource for Head Start programs that cannot be overlooked, are other Head Start programs. To provide a platform for programs to share best practices and support one another, OHS has created MyPeers. This virtual platform allows programs and program staff to connect with one another to share best practices and support one another. Additional information on the MyPeers virtual network can be found here - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-collaborative-platform-early-care-education-community>. Program Specialists may also support connecting programs for the purpose of supporting one another.

### **Closing**

Ms. Linehan closed by thanking the tribal leadership who attended and shared how they are in good hands with Mr. Lertjuntharangool and his team, acknowledging how deeply they care about the everyday experiences, conditions, and concerns that tribes are struggling with, as well as how she admires the incredible work the tribes are doing in the midst of these challenges. She also extended thanks on behalf of Dr. Bergeron, and that she hopes to continue these dialogues and get answers to the concerns that were raised. Before turning the floor over to Mr. Lertjuntharangool, Ms. Linehan encouraged the tribal leaders to explore additional paths of advocacy to make changes that are important to the tribal communities.

Mr. Lertjuntharangool thanked everyone for their time and expressed appreciation of the dedication to the field of early childhood and serving tribal children and their families. He shared how the information will be useful in terms of planning and knowing what to focus on in the months and years to come. He thanked everyone once again and wished them all a safe fall and winter.