

## **Building a Sustainable Head Start Program**

Director Khari Garvin: Hi, I'm Khari Garvin, the director of the Office of Head Start in Washington, D.C., at the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Recently, our office proposed changes to the Head Start Program Performance Standards, which outline the requirements for all Head Start programs. We are collecting feedback on these proposed changes from you and other members of the public, before making final decisions and publishing revised standards. We are proposing many changes that would make Head Start programs a better place to work and would support overall quality improvement across many areas of Head Start services.

You might be wondering, how we are going to pay for all these proposed changes? We've designed these changes to create a stable path for Head Start programs moving forward. Right now, many programs are having a hard time recruiting the staff necessary to serve the children and families they've committed to serving. And even programs that are fully staffed have a hard time keeping their staff once folks realize that they aren't earning what they deserve for this demanding and important work.

A lot of programs have already considered how to right-size their programs to make the necessary changes that keep their highly skilled and qualified staff at their Head Start program, rather than staff leaving for a job in the retail or food service industries that pays better even if it isn't what they are passionate about. These proposals build on those existing efforts and would guarantee that Head Start programs across the country would offer competitive and attractive jobs and healthy work environments. We expect that no children who are currently enrolled in Head Start programs would lose their services because of these changes.

We think our proposal gives Head Start programs the time they need to plan and to work out a sustainable program model that does not ask staff, who are often women of color, to work at poverty level wages. It is possible, in the absence of additional appropriations from Congress, that some programs may need to right-size by offering fewer spots to children in future years. But overall, we expect the total number of children the Head Start program will serve nationwide will remain about the same as it is today. Most importantly, we will be able to serve Head Start children and families better with healthier and more consistent staff with the same outstanding credentials. That is how Head Start will stay the gold standard program it has been and prepare children and families for school and for life.

Here at the federal Office of Head Start we designed these proposals after listening to people in the field and reading up on the latest research from experts. But now, we are asking you directly, what do you think about these proposed changes to the standards? How would they impact you? Do you think they would be good for the Head Start program? How do you foresee them impacting your community? Your engagement is essential to making sure we continue to improve Head Start programs nationwide.

Now is the time to give us comments on this proposed rule. Your thoughts should be shared on a website called the Federal Register. You can find out more information about the proposed

policies and how to share your thoughts by following the QR code or the link to the ECLKC website on your screen. Thank you for being a part of the Head Start family. We wouldn't be here without you. So long.