

Supporting the Head Start Workforce and Consistent Quality Programming

Director Khari Garvin: Well, good afternoon and welcome everyone. Thank you for joining us today for this webinar. My name is Khari Garvin, and I am the proud director of the Office of Head Start. And I am thrilled to be here with my colleague, Miss Shawna Pinckney, the associate deputy director of the Office of Head Start. And we are going to share some exciting news about Head Start and also with you, the Head Start and the Head Start community department and the broader early care and education community. I'm sorry about that. I'm just too excited. Right. But the Office of Head Start, we are super pleased to announce that a notice of proposed rulemaking, which is also sometimes referred to as an NPRM, is available to preview in the Federal Register to support the Head Start workforce and quality initiatives across many areas of Head Start services.

These changes would be significant updates to the Head Start Program Performance Standards, which outline requirements for all Head Start programs. If the proposed changes are implemented, they will help ensure the Head Start program remains the national leader in providing high quality early education and other comprehensive services, particularly for children and families who are furthest from opportunity. We are proposing changes that would ensure all of our programs are on a sustainable, stable path for years to come. We also anticipate that if these proposed changes are implemented, that they would stabilize and grow the Head Start workforce and improve the quality of the comprehensive services that Head Start families count on.

Shawna and I are excited to share more specifics about these proposed changes, which would work together to maintain quality, protect child health and safety, and once again ensure the program is on a sustainable path as we look to our future. Shawna.

Shawna Pinckney: This is indeed a very exciting day. We're thrilled to be with our grantee community today. But before we dive in, I just want to briefly go over how this webinar will work in our time together today. First, we wanted to let folks know that Spanish interpretation is available during today's webinar. You can just click the interpretation button down at the bottom of your screen, and you will be automatically connected. You can also use the chat function to communicate with us as presenters, and you can also use the Q&A function to submit a question. We would love to hear your questions. That said, we may not have time to actually address them directly during our time together today, but please do submit your questions. I'll definitely share more a little bit later about resources we have available at the end of our webinar. Khari.

Khari: Thanks so much, Shawna. Listen, all, we have been listening a lot to many programs across this country, U.S. territories, and tribal nations, as you all have been sharing unprecedented challenges in providing services to the children and families that you serve. We have heard that many programs are struggling to recruit the necessary staff, and even programs that are fully staffed are still having a hard time with retaining qualified staff. Head Start programs share that they have lost teachers to other employers, including the food

service and retail industries and other education programs, because they cannot provide competitive compensation.

Shawna: And it's important to recognize certainly, that while we all know that working in Head Start is incredibly rewarding, we also know it is very demanding work. And certainly since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have heard clearly that the work has only gotten more challenging. Over the past decade, we have seen significant growth in the qualifications of our Head Start staff, but unfortunately, in many programs, increases in compensation simply have not kept up.

Khari: For years, Head Start services have been expanded at the expense of low paid workers and this just is not sustainable.

Shawna: Could not agree more. And we know that staff turnover in our Head Start programs is at the highest point in 20 years. Research has shown that low compensation and inadequate benefits are a major contributor to our current workforce shortage. And certainly there are other factors aside from compensation that are also contributing to the shortage.

Khari: That's right. Every day we get letters from the field sharing the need to make meaningful structural changes to the Head Start program in order to support high quality services now as well as in the long term. The Head Start program is really at a critical point. We need to help stabilize the workforce and in many cases, improve program environments to make Head Start a better, safer place to work. Children, families, and staff need more intentional, proactive supports for their mental health and well-being. We want to incorporate lessons we've learned about areas for improvement and clarification since the last major revision to our Head Start Program Performance Standards back to 2016.

We are proposing changes that we expect will effectively and equitably meet the evolving needs of the communities we serve. Now, the proposals are our best efforts to update the Head Start Program Performance Standards, and we believe the proposed changes reflect the direction the Head Start program needs to move in. Our proposals were informed by listening to you as well as research and policy experts in the field. But we recognize that you all are really the true experts on how these would impact programs children, families, and staff if the proposed changes are put into practice.

Shawna: And that's right. And we definitely want to be clear that at this point, these are proposals. Over the next 60 days, we will ask the public for feedback, and you will help us get it exactly right. After taking additional time to review and consider that feedback, we will put forth the final changes to the Performance Standards. Now, that being said, it's really important to note that in the meantime, the current Head Start Program Performance Standards absolutely remain in effect.

Now, as we dive into going through what we have proposed in our NPRM, we've divided the proposed changes into three major areas. Each of these areas, Khari and I will speak to you more in detail about during this webinar. These three areas include workforce supports, mental health, and other quality improvements. Now, each of these buckets have varying effective dates and timelines, and they range anywhere from 60 days up to 3 years. We absolutely recognize that some of our proposals programs will need more time to thoughtfully plan and thoughtfully implement those changes. As you can see in these buckets, we have several

proposed changes to discuss with you in detail. Let's begin with workforce supports and share in detail what proposed changes are included in the rule.

Khari: All right, I'm ready, Shawna, if you are. All right. When we talk about workforce supports, we are thinking about how to make Head Start programs a better place to work. We propose changes that would support the Head Start workforce holistically in several ways. We will begin by discussing our changes to promote competitive wages that reflect the value and commitment of Head Start staff, as well as their qualifications and experience. And I do want to take a minute to say more about why we are so focused on wages.

Now, first of all, our Head Start staff and especially our education staff are well qualified. And here's one example. About 70% of our Head Start preschool teachers have a bachelor's degree, but the average wages these staff earn do not reflect those qualifications. And as you can see on the slide, our preschool teachers earn just under \$39,000 annually. And you want to know what's more alarming? That amount is far below the average salaries earned by kindergarten teachers and public preschool teachers. Someone please tell me where is the equity in that? This gap in pay is not sustainable for our programs, and we need to take decisive action to ensure our staff are compensated in a way that reflects their qualifications and responsibilities, so that our programs can recruit and retain the best and most talented staff.

Shawna, can you please share more specifically what these proposed changes would do with respect to staff wages?

Shawna: Absolutely. This is such exciting news. We think that some of our proposed standards for staff wages, we think of them as four interrelated standards. These standards, as I talked about before, have a longer implementation timeline than the other proposed standards. The wage standards specifically would go into effect August 2031. Several years from the proposed implementation date of the final rule. With that, I'm so excited to share this first proposed standard.

We propose to require programs to make significant, measurable progress to pay parity for Head Start education staff with kindergarten through third grade teachers. You might ask yourself, what does that look like? Well, to achieve progress to parity, programs must ensure each of their education staff members is paid an annual salary that is at least comparable to the annual salary paid to public school preschool teachers, and that that comparable salary be in their local or neighboring school district. And we certainly want to make sure that these there is an alignment with similar qualifications and experience. Now, by education staff, we mean those Head Start staff who work directly with children in classrooms or homes as part of their daily responsibility. And this includes Head Start teachers, teacher assistants, home visitors, and family child care providers.

Lastly, when determining salaries for these staff, we ask that programs consider their roles and responsibilities, qualifications, and experience. Our second in the proposed wage standards is that we're requiring programs to establish or update a pay structure for all staff positions. Now, we assume most programs already have a pay structure in place that includes a wage ladder or a salary scale. But this proposed standard requires programs to take a meaningful look at this pay structure and ensure that it considers responsibilities, qualifications, experience, and

schedule, or the actual hours work. The intention of this proposed change is truly to promote competitive wages across all staff positions in your programs.

Third, we propose to require that the minimum pay for all staff must be at least sufficient to cover basic cost of living in the program's local geographic area. In most areas of the country, we assume that this would be around \$15 per hour. And for the last part of our wage standards, we want programs to ensure that wages are comparable across Head Start preschool and Early Head Start staff for those with similar qualifications and experience.

Khari: Shawna, I think we're off to a good start. I don't know if you were paying attention or not, but they're lighten up the chat board and lots of positive reactions. Lots of hearts and thumbs up and applause images come coming forth. I think I think we're resonating. But thank you. It was an excellent overview. We got a lot more to do.

When we talk about staff compensation, we want to make sure that you understand that wages really are just one piece of that issue. And it is also important to provide Head Start staff with comprehensive benefits. We're really talking about both wages and benefits. And we happen to know that our staff sometimes are leaving our programs to take jobs in other industries, like I mentioned before. But the reason is often because they can secure better benefits in those other industries. We also know that some of our programs have established robust benefits for staff, and as a result of that, they have the ability to retain quality staff in their programs.

Shawna, please share with our audience the things that we are proposing as they relate to improving staff benefits.

Shawna: Of course. Of course. I'm delighted to share that our proposed standards require programs to provide several benefits for full-time staff. Those include access to health insurance, and that could either be through an employer sponsored plan or by connecting staff to health insurance options in the health care marketplace. This also includes access to short term behavioral health services at no or minimal cost to the employee. It also includes paid sick leave, paid family leave, and paid personal leave. And for our part time staff, we propose that programs must connect these staff with health insurance options such as through the health care marketplace. And finally, we propose for programs to facilitate connections to child care subsidy programs and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program for all staff who are eligible.

Khari: All right. Still lighting up that chat board. I think we're still on a good roll here. I want to thank you again for that overview.

We recognize there are other important aspects of supporting the workforce right beyond wages and benefits. And we want to ensure that programs are a healthy, positive place for staff to work where they actually feel empowered and supported every day and give their best for children and families. In recognition of this, the next set of changes that we will talk about, or at least proposed changes we will discuss, will aim to support a positive work climate in programs that will promote overall staff health and wellness, and also facilitate positive interactions between staff and children. Now, we do want to acknowledge that there are many programs out there that have already taken important steps in this space. But Shawna, can you please now speak to what we propose in this particular area.

Shawna: Yes. First we propose a requirement that programs must support a culture of wellness promotion and staff empowerment in your programs. Next, we propose to require programs to provide regularly scheduled breaks for all staff during their workday. We know that classroom staff in particular have moments where they're just feeling overwhelmed, just need a moment to gather themselves. We also propose for classroom staff to have access to brief, unscheduled, what we're calling wellness breaks as folks need them. We envision these wellness breaks as a brief opportunity for a staff member to just step away, take a breath, and regroup before returning to the children.

Next, we know also that the physical health of our staff is critically important to their overall wellbeing. We propose to require that programs provide staff with access to adult-size furniture in your classrooms. And finally, our proposed changes require a management style that does a couple of things. One, that it encourages employee engagement; two, that it promotes and values open communication between managers and staff; and three, that it identifies and addresses barriers to high quality job performance for staff.

Khari: Still on the roll, Shawna. I'm still seeing all the heart emojis and celebratory factors coming up. Again, I think we are communicating some pretty positive things. Again, thank you for that overview. I do want to just call a time out for a moment. I want to flag for all of our viewers out there that we are hosting a webinar on Monday, that is to say, Monday coming up, November 20th, that will actually provide a deeper dive into these workforce standards that we're describing now. That will be Monday, November 20th at 1:30 p.m. Eastern time. Be aware of that. And if you're interested in getting more information, please register for that one as well.

But I'm going to shift us now. We're going to shift the conversation away from the benefits and the wages and compensation to talk specifically about mental health supports and the things that we're proposing in the rule with respect to mental health and supporting mental health. It is important to us that you and the children that you serve feel safe and supported and cared for in Head Start, and we have proposed a variety of changes to our Head Start standards that do exactly that, including strengthening support for mental health. We propose changes to elevate the importance of mental health and better integrate mental health supports throughout all Head Start services. Our proposed changes would help address the increasing rates of mental health needs and facilitate a proactive approach to support the overall well-being of children, families, and of course, staff.

Shawna, once again going to lean on you to ask you here to just share some details of what we include in our proposed rule as those things relate to mental health.

Shawna: First, we propose to require programs to establish a multidisciplinary mental health team responsible for a variety of activities. Let me walk through what some of these activities would be. This would include the coordination of a program wide mental health supports for children, families, and staff. And it would include an annual review of mental health consultation services. We also propose changes to clarify that the role of mental health consultation within programs is to build the capacity of adults in the program to support children's mental health. Lastly, we propose to allow programs to work with mental health

consultants who are not yet licensed. Now that is as long as they provide those services under the supervision of another licensed mental health professional.

We also propose to integrate mental health more intentionally with other areas of program services. That includes family support services, services for expectant families, and screening services. Lastly, we propose clearer requirements for suspension and expulsion and including clearly defining those terms.

Khari: All right. I think we're making great progress. Again, thank you for that overview. I want to shift us one more time to our third bucket of changes. That's quality improvement. We're moving away from workforce supports. We're moving away from mental health. And now we want to talk about just general quality improvements. When we have that in mind, you will see collectively these proposed changes are about one, helping Head Start programs effectively and equitably meet the evolving needs of the communities that they serve, and two, improving the quality of services Head Start programs are known for.

We'll touch on proposed changes for the services provided to Families First. And as many of you know, a cornerstone of Head Start is our work with parents and families in our programs. Our goal with the proposed changes is to strengthen the ability of our family service workers to provide individualized supports for families by promoting a reasonable workload for these staff. Shawna, once again can you kind of walk us through the proposed policy changes in this area.

Shawna: To better engage with families, we propose to establish a maximum caseload of 40 families per family service worker. We believe this will really allow for the dedicated, individualized approach that we know our families need. However, if the family service workers in any particular program already have caseloads of families lower than 40, programs are certainly encouraged to maintain that level of your caseloads.

Alternatively, if a program can justify that a caseload is higher than 40, this still allows for the dedicated, individualized approach and is reasonable for the staff member, our proposed changes allow for that flexibility as well. There's flexibility below 40 as well as some flexibility above 40 to the extent that programs can really ensure the same individualized approach. All of this, of course, is about determining just the right balance depending on the individual needs of our families.

Khari: Right. Sounds good. Now we are still in the quality improvement bucket, but now we want to talk a little bit about services to expectant families. We're going to turn to proposed changes related to requirements for providing services to expectant families. Once again, we know many of our programs serve this population. However, we have learned through our interactions with programs that the requirements for serving expectant families have not always been clear. And we in the Office of Head Start also do not always have a good understanding of what programs are doing for this population of families. Our proposed changes in this area aim to ensure responsive, high quality services for inspected families. Shawna, once again you're up. Can you summarize the proposed changes to expectant families, please?

Shawna: We propose clearer requirements for programs related to tracking and reporting on services to our expected families. We are proposing to clarify the intent of the newborn visit

that, at a minimum, should include a discussion of topics to support postpartum mental and physical health, infant health, and support basic needs. Currently, our programs are not required to use a curriculum with enrolled expected families. However, if programs choose to use a curriculum, we propose a change to clarify that this curriculum should be appropriate for use with expectant families and focused on maternal and child health. And lastly, in this area, we propose a new requirement that asks programs to do their part to help address disparities in racial and ethnic pre- and post-natal outcomes for our expectant families.

Khari: Still a great overview. Thank you for that. Still talking about quality improvements, at least that bucket. But now I want to turn our focus to community assessment. Another hallmark of Head Start is that our grant recipients strive to design programs that are responsive to the needs of the individual communities they serve. The community assessment is a foundational part of program planning and of course, a foundational part of designing services. However, we also know the process of conducting the community assessment, including the annual update, can be a little bit cumbersome, and programs may be collecting more data than are actually necessary.

Our goals here with the proposed changes to the community assessment are really to streamline the process for programs, to help programs think more intentionally about the data they use, and to identify opportunities to reduce burden throughout the entire process. Shawna, once again, what do we propose in this area?

Shawna: We just want to highlight a couple of things in this area. First, we propose changes to require programs to more intentionally plan for their community assessment. And this includes how they will use identified data to support the goals of their programs. We also propose changes to help reduce burden on programs, such as identifying existing data that could be used in the place of collecting new data, and that these could be costly or challenging to collect. Using existing data in the place of particularly costly and challenging to collect some new data. And then lastly, for the annual update to the community assessment, we propose to only require an annual update when needed to identify significant shifts in the community that may impact program design and services.

Khari: All right, still getting a lot of thumbs up and hearts and all of that. I think we're on the right track still in the name of quality improvements. And I want to shift one more time to barriers to enrollment and attendance. Shawna, thank you again for laying that out for us. We do know some families that are eligible for Head Start services may not actually enroll in the program. We also know that there are other instances where there is a family that might actually be enrolled, but they face challenges consistently bringing their child to the program every day. We also know this is often those families who need us the most, such as families experiencing homelessness or families who don't have access to reliable transportation. And let me just take a moment to pause and say that families experiencing homelessness and prioritizing those services is one of our national priorities for the Office of Head Start.

Next, we will turn to a set of proposed changes that ask programs to really think critically and intentionally about whatever those barriers are that families may experience enrolling in the program or attending the program consistently. Shawna, once again, let's talk about this a little bit, please.

Shawna: Just tying it back to the community assessment a bit, we propose that as part of the community assessment process, programs must identify transportation resources or the lack thereof in the community that you're serving as programs consider what kinds of barriers children and families may face regarding engagement in the program. Then programs will be asked to consider why children who are selected for the program don't actually end up enrolling or enroll, but do not attend regularly. And finally, where possible, we ask programs to address these barriers. And that could mean that they decide to provide or facilitate access to transportation.

Khari: All right. Again, we're not done yet. Almost there. But in terms of quality improvements, they also want to look at a set of proposed changes around identifying families living in poverty and the definition of income and so on and so forth. We do know, I think we all share the same understanding that the primary way, or at least one main way, that we determine Head Start eligibility, is based on family income. We also know that the definition of income we include in our current Head Start standards can be a little bit confusing sometimes. And on top of that, we know that in some areas of the country, particularly in big cities, families have a higher cost of living driven largely by expensive housing.

These families might be earning just dollars above the poverty threshold, but they spend a lot of money on housing. They have very little left at the end of each month after paying their rent or their mortgage. For those reasons, we are proposing a change that will help address this issue so that these families that are effectively living in poverty for all practical purposes, will now remain eligible for Head Start.

Shawna, everything we've talked about is really important, but this one is particularly important. Can you tell folks what we mean about the intersection between eligibility and the cost of housing?

Shawna: This is such an exciting piece of our proposal. I want to make sure that I walk through it slowly for folks. First, we are proposing to revise the existing definition of income in our standards. And we want to do this in a way that provides a clear list of possible sources of family income, and only those sources should be considered or would be considered. Now for how we would account for a high cost of living. We propose that if a family spends an excessive amount of their income on housing. Again, if a family is spending an excessive amount of their income on housing. Another way to think about that could be anything over 30% of their income, that the excessive cost could be deducted from the family's income, and that would be for eligibility purposes.

That could mean that a family with a gross income just over the poverty line would now be eligible for Head Start, and that would be after their housing costs are taken into account. Now this is a bit of a change. It's an exciting change. We wanted to let folks know we'll have a summary of these changes on our ECLKC website. And there we will have some great examples that will walk you through just how we propose this adjustment to work.

Khari: And I really love this one. I love them all. But again, the chat board is just it's just lighting up in unbelievable ways. I just want to pause here. I don't want to rush into the next one yet, and I really do want time for this to sink in. This is huge. And this is really directly in response to

what we've been hearing from the field about inflationary costs and exorbitant costs for living, including housing, and how this sort of puts Head Start out of reach for families who have to spend so much of their household budget or household income to support housing. This is, I think, really tremendous and really matches up and aligns well with what we've been hearing for so long. I just want this to sink in before we move to the next one, just for 10 seconds. How about that?

But as we think about, we're still talking about quality improvement. Now, I want to move us now to think about some things in terms of child health and safety as those things relate to quality improvement. First of all, it is important that our programs always do everything they can to protect children from exposure to toxins like lead, for example. And because we also know that lead exposure in early childhood can be really harmful to children's development, it's critical that Head Start programs take a proactive approach to safety. It's essential that if a safety incident occurs, that programs also know that they need to report that incident to the Office of Head Start.

Shawna, as we continue thinking about quality improvements and now shifting our focus to child health and safety, can you please walk us through the changes that we're proposing in this regard.

Shawna: Yes, of course. We are also proposing a set of requirements for programs specifically for testing for lead in water and in paint. If lead hazards are found, we're asking programs to take steps to address those hazards. We also require that programs notify parents and staff of the lead testing results. Next, we also have a variety of changes to support child safety more broadly, including some new requirements focused on actual preventing of child safety incidents. We also clarify what safety incidents must be reported and continue to be reported to the Office of Head Start. And finally, we are also updating the Standards of Conduct to clearly describe behaviors that we consider to be inappropriate when working with children and which behaviors are prohibited. A lot of these changes in this area align with broader definitions of child maltreatment.

Khari: All right. I hope everyone's still hanging in there with us. We're still on quality improvements. Going to shift the focus one more time and talk a little bit about Early Head Start service duration and family child care ratios. Shawna, thank you for covering that last segment. We do know that some of our existing Head Start Program Performance Standards have sometimes caused confusion for the field, and we want to make sure that our expectations are clear across all aspects of program delivery. Shawna, what can you tell us about what we're proposing here?

Shawna: As many folks know, our current requirement for service duration for Early Head Start center-based programs specifically is at least 1380 hours or 1380 hours per program year. And it's always been our expectation that this means year-round services. That said, we propose to make this expectation explicitly clear in our standards by specifying that Early Head Start center-based services must be across at least 46 weeks per year. We also propose some changes to clarify expectations for the family child care option, both for ratios and for provider qualifications. And then lastly, for family child care provider qualifications, all staff count towards the ratio must meet qualifications for a family child care provider.

Khari: All right. Again, thank you for walking us through that. That brings us actually to the last set of changes that we're going to discuss for today. And the last couple of changes are really focused on how we talk about Head Start and communicate with families. We've established some definitions of the overall birth to five Head Start program, along with different program types. We're also asking programs to take a look at the way in which they engage and communicate with families to improve what we consider to be the customer service experience, so to speak. Shawna, what are we proposing here?

Shawna: First, we're proposing a new definition for Head Start. This will mean our new definition will mean the entire birth to five Head Start program. When you think about the big umbrella that encompasses all of the different program types that we offer in our Head Start universe. Now we are proposing to use Head Start Preschool, and this will refer to services provided to our preschoolers. And then we'll continue to use Early Head Start for programs that serve expectant families, infants, and toddlers. Adding a new definition that is Head Start Preschool.

And then lastly, we have several changes that are focused on how programs communicate with families. To start, we are proposing that programs use modern technology when you recruit families, and that our hope is that this reduces burden in the application and enrollment process. And we are also proposing requirements that programs must identify and use the best communication avenues available that would effectively engage prospective and enrolled families of all abilities. Khari, I think that about wraps up the major changes that are proposed in the notice of proposed rulemaking.

Khari: Well, Shawna, you have done a yeoman's job today. I really appreciate that. I would just ask those of you in virtual world to give a virtual round of applause for my colleague who has really walked through so many, so many different standards with a lot of complexity, but did it very simply. Shawna, thank you for laying that out for all of us the way that you did.

As we wrap up our time together, some of you might be wondering, well, how are we going to pay for all of these proposed changes? And I'm glad that you asked that question. I want you to know that we have designed these changes, really to create a stable pathway for Head Start programs moving forward. And we've talked really at length about how we have heard from the field about the challenges. This is our best attempt to create real stability and a real pathway for stability for Head Start programs now and into the future.

A lot of programs have already considered how to right size their programs and to make whatever necessary changes they need to make to keep their highly skilled and qualified staff at their program. These proposals that we're talking about really build on those existing and ongoing efforts to right size the program, and they would really guarantee that Head Start programs across the country would offer competitive and attractive jobs, as well as healthy work environments. We expect that no children who are currently enrolled in Head Start programs would lose their services because of these proposed changes, even if we don't get additional funding to support these changes.

And I really want to put a fine point on this, right? I am talking about our actual enrollment, which can fluctuate sometimes compared to the funded enrollment, and we do not expect that

any of the number of children currently being served today would lose access to Head Start based on these changes, even if Congress appropriates no more funding for this program. Also, we are fully expecting that no child will get kicked out of the program to accommodate these changes.

In other words, if a child is currently being served or a child and family is currently being served, no one somehow gets booted from the program to make room for these new changes. We do think that our proposal gives Head Start programs the time that they need to plan, the time that they need to work out a sustainable program model that does not ask staff anymore, who, by the way, are primarily women of color to work at poverty level wages. We say no more to that. We're drawing the line in the sand, and we're saying no more to that.

We hope to get additional funding from Congress to help support this proposal. However, it is possible that even in the absence of additional funding from Congress, that some programs may need to right size by offering either 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. And that's really what the goal here is. And one more thing I just want to say, I hope you know, when Shawna was walking through talking about the disparity in pay for Head Start teachers with public school teachers, I hope you did not miss where she also talked about the proposal for all Head Start staff, even those who are not teachers, to still be paid a living wage based on the true cost of living in whatever part of the country where you live. That's another part of this proposal.

As we close up our time together or wind down our time together, I want to offer a word about the importance of the public comment period. Head start staff, Head Start parents, families are really the cornerstone of our program. And staff, parent, and family engagement in policymaking is an important part of what makes Head Start program successful. We want to hear from you. How would these proposed changes impact you and your program? We want you to think about that. We want you to think about whether or not that these proposed changes would be good for the children that you serve in your programs. How do you foresee these proposed changes impacting your community? How do you see them impacting your program?

We hope you will read the areas of the proposed standards where you have experience or expertise, and make specific comments, whether they're positive or negative, so we know if we got it right or not, and so that we'll know what needs to be adjusted or not. Please, please make sure your feedback with us. Sorry. Please make sure to share your feedback with us on the Federal Register once the public comment period begins, which is on Monday, November 20th. On Monday coming up, the 60 day clock will begin, and you can submit your comments for 60 days after publication, which means you have until around January 19th or so to give us your feedback. Shawna.

Shawna: And we know that the information that Khari and I have shared with you today, we've just highlighted some key areas of our notice of proposed rulemaking. It is a lot to take in and

absorb. We really want to make sure that you have the resources you need to fully understand these proposed changes. And as Khari has highlighted, and to make sure that you submit your feedback. To support you, we have a collection of resources posted on the ECLKC, and our hope is that these resources will really help you.

Up on the screen here, we have a QR code. We ask that you scan that code and visit the website. At the website, when you get there, you will see we have the standards posted with the proposed changes, and we've done the work of showing you the changes in tracked changes so that you can see exactly where our proposed changes are and how they compare with our current performance standards. I am also excited to review that tool. Also at the website, we have brief summaries of the different areas of changes, as well as a broader overview of the NPRM. Each is a brief fact sheet summarizing all of the major changes that we propose.

And if you enjoy listening to Khari as much as I do, we also have several short videos from our director also posted on the ECLKC. Khari here is encouraging all the public comment and feedback on our NPRM. One of those videos is targeted to parents and families and the other video is targeted to our program staff. We strongly encourage you to share these videos with your staff and your families. We really are hoping to engage families and staff directly in this comment period and to seek their thoughts on our proposed policy changes. And finally, as another tool, we have established an email inbox that we will use to collect all of the questions that you might have on the NPRM. That mailbox is also currently shown on this slide.

If you have any questions about this process or the proposed changes, we really encourage you to send those to this email address. That said, I want to emphasize, please do not send your comments on the proposed changes to this email. If you have questions broadly about the process, feel free to use the email address. But we want you to follow the formal process for submitting your comments so that we make sure we can absolutely consider comments that are submitted and that those comments be submitted through the Federal Register specifically, or the mailing address. All of that information is included in the NPRM.

Again, you can find information on how to submit your comment using this really helpful QR code. And just one more reminder before I go is, as we've mentioned earlier, our current Head Start Program Performance Standards remain fully in effect until a Final Rule is issued.

Khari: Shawna, thank you for that. We are really just about at the end. I'm going to make one final impassioned plea to all of you as we close out our time together this afternoon. First of all, I want to thank everyone for joining us today and for carving out time to be a part of this webinar. That's the first thing. The second is, is that we throw a lot of information at you. And Shawna again, did an excellent job walking through some pretty complex concepts. But would ask you to do a couple of things. One is spend some time with the proposal. It's a lengthy document, but spend some time with it. Kind of comb through it a little bit. Change can sometimes feel uneasy, even good change can. But just like all of you to give this some thought, and as we have asked you before, particularly in those areas of expertise that you have, laser focus on those and let us know good, bad, or otherwise, whether you think we've hit the target or not, and submit that feedback to us in the ways that Shawna has described.

I do want to say as clearly as I can as we close out, I'm trying to look you right in the eye here. Head start program staff are absolutely the foundation of our mission to provide high quality early childhood education and comprehensive services to children and families. Without staff, there is no Head Start program, period. We simply can't do it without you. Certainly the children and families, but the staff, you all are really the cornerstone, the centerpiece, the foundation that makes this work. Anyone who has interacted with Head Start programs even once, has witnessed the commitment of program staff.

And here at the Office of Head Start, we deeply value the vital contributions of every role. Teachers, of course, but family service staff and home visitors and cooks and custodians and bus drivers and managers and center directors and leaders and on and on it goes. We can't do it without you. And we value, we need every part of working together to make this Head Start dream come to life. Thank you for the effort and thank you for the way that you've been digging in, particularly during these very challenging times. And I know that during these challenging times, Head Start staff have shown up every day, many times, putting your own needs to the side, but you've shown up at those critical times to deliver those critical supports and program services to children and families when they have absolutely needed them the most. You've done your part to show up, and now we're doing our part to show up.

We're using this opportunity. We have to take this opportunity to help stabilize the Head Start workforce. We're showing up in that way. We're doing everything we can to stabilize the workforce, sustain the programs now, and also going forward, we do anticipate that our proposed changes for increased compensation and other supports will accomplish exactly that. This is how we envision making the Head Start 2.0 for the future, the Head Start for the 21st century. Tomorrow, we will share a more in depth overview of the policies that we are proposing to support the workforce. Join us for that webinar if you're interested, or watch the recording when you can. But please, please be sure to go to the Federal Register and tell us what you think of the proposed policies that we have shared today. Thank you for your time today. Thank you for the effort and have a great rest of your week. So long everyone!