

## **Director Garvin's Message on Full Enrollment Initiative**

Director Khari Garvin: Hello, everyone. I am Khari Garvin, the director of the Office of Head Start. I really hope that things are going well for you in this new year.

I am sending you this message at this moment to directly respond to all of the feedback the Office of Head Start has received throughout the course of last year about the Full Enrollment Initiative. Almost everywhere I have gone, I have heard from many of you about how the Full Enrollment Initiative feels like an unfair burden to Head Start programs and that it also feels like the Office of Head Start is unaware of all of the challenges with staffing and other factors that make it difficult for programs to stay fully enrolled.

I want to plainly say that this is not the intention of the Full Enrollment Initiative, and it is definitely not the tone that we want to set with Head Start grant recipients across the country that are working so hard to navigate through some challenging times. I want you to know that we are evaluating all aspects of the Full Enrollment Initiative to more fully support each grant recipient that is under-enrolled.

Now, it's important that we all understand that implementing the Full Enrollment Initiative is not optional, because it is required by law, with several specific elements prescribed in the Head Start Act. But we are reviewing the law to find as many areas of flexibility as possible that we can extend to our grant recipients. Going forward, we will be improving the quality of the customer service you experience while participating in the Full Enrollment Initiative.

For example, we have already changed the tone of the letter that we must send out to grant recipients to announce their inclusion in the Full Enrollment Initiative, after receiving your feedback. It is never an easy message to deliver, but we want to make sure that we do so as compassionately as possible. We will also be evaluating other areas where we can be both more responsive and mindful of communication and the supports provided.

And for grant recipients that are proposing to make adjustments to their program design or structure through the Change in Scope application process, we are working right now to create new technical assistance resources to expedite the process and shorten the timetable for approvals. And you can expect more support from the Office of Head Start with preparing viable applications.

The bottom line is that we are in this together, and we are re-committing ourselves to collaborate with you to work through all aspects of the Full Enrollment Initiative process in better coordination with you. I just wanted you to know that we know that things are still tough for many, as you are working hard during a workforce crisis; and we know that many communities are still adjusting to changes that occurred during the pandemic. Some of our programs are still working with challenges that existed even before the pandemic! Back in May we released a webinar on the Full Enrollment Initiative with Program Operations Division director Heather Wanderski and me. It's on the ECLKC website.

We also have a Program Instruction from June 2018 outlining what you can expect from the Full Enrollment Initiative, as well as an Information Memorandum from 2022 discussing the process to reduce enrollment or convert slots from Head Start preschool to Early Head Start.

I urge you to revisit all these resources. They are there for your convenience. Thank you for the effort and thank you for the hard work you do to serve children and support families. So long everyone.