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## **Local Head Start Supporters Meet with Congressional Staff About Lifetime Benefits for At-Risk Kids**

**(GAITHERSBURG, MD)** – Over 400 members of the Head Start community gathered in Washington, D.C. last Tuesday, January 24<sup>th</sup> to learn, network and advocate. Conference participants heard six Members of Congress speak at the National Head Start Association (NHSA) breakfast, and many took time to meet with their Senators, Representatives and Congressional staff about the importance of their programs in their districts. Two members of the Maryland Head Start Association, Monica Ortiz, Program Manager for Family Services, Inc. (FSI) Discovery Station Early Head Start program and Mary Gunning of the Head Start program at St. Jerome’s Catholic Church in Baltimore, MD represented the local districts. Ms. Ortiz, Co-chair of the MHSA Public Policy Committee with Ms. Gunning visited the D.C. offices of their Senators and Representatives, thanking them for their continued support of investments in Head Start and Early Head Start this year.

Head Start was given the opportunity to share countless success stories, program facts and studies detailing the positive impact this organization has on its participants throughout the state. Head Start representatives met with Mario Cardona and Brent Palmer from Senator Barbara Mikulski’s office, Matt Tefteau from Representative Andrew Harris’ office, Amanda Mendoza from Senator Benjamin Cardin’s office, and Sarah Schenning from Representative Chris Van Hollen’s office.

“Despite the intense pressure Congress is under to reign in government spending, we know that Head Start has bipartisan support,” stated Ms. Ortiz. “Democrats and Republicans alike agree that the education and overall well-being of our country’s at-risk children is a top priority and that Head Start is integral in ensuring their future success. We appreciate the time these staffers took in meeting with us at such a busy time for Congress. Millions of young children across the nation are counting on their support.”

Head Start representatives shared with staffers information about early childhood development services currently provided by their organization, including the impact quality early education has on a child’s school readiness, children’s health and nutrition, parental involvement, and family support services. Furthermore, they provided statistical and financial information highlighting the benefits of the United States investing in early childhood services because of its proven return on investment. For example, for every \$1 invested in Head Start, our nation receives \$7 back in increased earnings, employment, and family stability. At the same time, the rate of welfare dependency, crime costs, grade repetition and special education declines.

“The grassroots efforts made by the Head Start community are humbling and inspiring”, said Yasmina Vinci, Executive Director of the National Head Start Association (NHSA). “These programs are making a difference in so many communities throughout the country, and I’m glad that Monica Ortiz was able to help demonstrate the Montgomery County community support to lawmakers in Washington DC.”

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