

I am pleased to testify today on the Early Head Start program, one of the most vital and promising early childhood initiatives of the Clinton Administration. This program was created in the May, 1994 bipartisan reauthorization of the Head Start Act to extend the benefits of Head Start's comprehensive quality services to pregnant women, infants and toddlers. In less than four years, this program has grown from an idea to a thriving network of 173 local programs serving 22,000 children and families in all 50 States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. This year we plan to award \$120 million to fund new programs to serve an additional 17,000 children.

Designed with the help of a distinguished Advisory Committee of scholars and practitioners, Early Head Start acts on the expanding base of knowledge on how infants and toddlers grow and learn, on the rewards and key elements of successful prevention programs in the first years of life, and on the substantial and long-term costs of failing to support very young children and their families.

Certainly, the most astonishing component of this research is new revelations about the pathways and processes of brain development in infancy. We know more than ever about how very young children learn to understand and use language and how their early relationships with parents, family members and caregivers shape their long-term social and emotional development. We are

accumulating a solid picture of both the components of effective programs and the limited reach and variable quality of our existing system of services to our youngest children and their parents.

Based on this knowledge, Early Head Start is designed to foster three primary goals:

- To enhance children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development;
- To enable parents to be better caregivers and teachers for their children; and
- To help parents meet their own goals, including improving their own education and economic self-sufficiency.

Each Early Head Start program carries out a locally-designed program of services, organized around the cornerstones of child development, family development, community building and staff development. Programs offer high quality child care and early education, family support services, home visits, parent education, comprehensive health and mental health services (including services for women prior to, during and after pregnancy) and nutrition.

Early Head Start coordinates with the Department of Education's program for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. For example, Early Head Start representatives serve on the Federal and State Interagency Coordinating Councils. These programs also work together at the local level, providing specialized services needed by children with disabilities within the comprehensive Early Head Start program.

From profiles of an initial set of 50 projects, we know that roughly one-half of Early Head Start families earn less than \$6,000 per year, one-third of the parents are employed full-time, one-fifth are enrolled in school or job training, and one-half are single parent households.

Local agencies receive grants to operate Early Head Start based on an open, national competitive process. School districts, non-profit community agencies, colleges and universities, local governments, mental health and health service organizations are among the organizations providing services. The two Early Head Start grantees in Connecticut are the Child Care Center of Stamford, Inc. in Stamford and The Access Agency, Inc. located in Willimantic.

My testimony today will focus on three core principles that embody our approach to managing the Early Head Start initiative.

Based on more than 30 years of experience in guiding operations in regular Head Start agencies, we provide leadership by:

- Setting forth a comprehensive strategy to support, enhance and enforce high standards for program quality;
  
- Providing flexibility to local community agencies so they can design services to fit the changing needs of families and take advantage of opportunities to partner with other local groups and resources; and
  
- Helping to stimulate the development of other State and local initiatives to serve very young children and parents, based on the Early Head Start model.

Safeguarding Quality

There is a special urgency to safeguarding the quality of Early Head Start programs. This program serves our most vulnerable and dependent children--they can't walk away or shield themselves from inadequate caregivers or unsafe environments.

Our commitment to program quality begins with the Head Start Program Performance Standards. As required in our last reauthorization, the Head Start Bureau completed a comprehensive revision of the Performance Standards that included, for the first time, creation of standards for serving infants, toddlers

and pregnant women. Based on input from thousands of early childhood experts and practitioners, the Performance Standards set forth consistent, high quality expectations for program services, organization and management. For example, these standards require Early Head Start staff members to earn a nationally-recognized training credential, the Child Development Associate certificate; mandate that each teacher work with no more than four infants and toddlers (so they can build strong, responsive relationships with each child); and require that each grantee establish a Policy Council to involve parents and community representatives in program planning and decision making.

We have learned that setting forth standards is only the first step in making quality a reality in a large national program. We must stand behind our standards in the way we fund programs, the way we inspect and hold agencies accountable for living up to our standards, and the way we offer training and technical assistance to help staff and programs rectify deficiencies in program quality.

A second element of our quality control strategy is to work with each local agency in a continuous process of program improvement. This year we are sending monitoring teams to review the services and management of 68 local programs that became fully operational last year. Each team includes experts in child development,

health, parent involvement and program management. The team conducts a thorough on-site assessment of program strengths, weaknesses and compliance with the performance standards. We then work with each agency to create a quality improvement plan to rectify any deficiencies, including specific timelines and reporting requirements.

Third, we have created a strong system to support training of Early Head Start staff members and managers and provide technical assistance to local agencies. Program directors participate in Head Start's management training institute at the UCLA Anderson School of Business, which is funded in partnership with the Johnson and Johnson Corporation. Teachers, home visitors and other staff attend intensive national training institutes on infant and toddler development and receive ongoing support through local college and university programs and professional organizations. Technical assistance is provided by expert consultants in infant and toddler development, health and family services and other components of program services and management. Programs receive on-site assistance and telephone consultation, as well as access to the most up-to-date, research-based materials and resources to guide their implementation efforts. An Early Head Start web page links each program with the technical assistance network and allows agencies to exchange materials and successful strategies.

A final component of our quality strategy is a strong research initiative, to allow us to learn in a systematic way about the long-term outcomes of this program on children and families and to assess what mixtures of program strategies and services are most effective. We selected 17 programs from our first two years of funding to participate in a national evaluation that will include careful assessment of how agencies implement the Early Head Start model and quality standards, and will track a range of program impacts on children, parents, and families. The national evaluation is based on an experimental design that involves random assignment of families to Early Head Start participation or a comparison group. Data collection will include a variety of measures of child development, video tapes of parent-child interaction, and interviews with mothers and fathers. This longitudinal national study will be complemented by a series of local research teams that will document local variations in program strategy and investigate issues of particular interest to local program managers and communities.

#### Supporting Local Flexibility

We balance strong requirements for program quality with a flexible stance on how communities design programs and use Early Head Start funds. Agencies have wide latitude in designing their program services to adapt to the needs of local families and to take advantage of opportunities to link with local community resources and partners. We expect grantees to continually

reassess these factors and to make periodic adjustments in their staffing, budgets, and mix of services. For example, many agencies are restructuring their staffing and program designs in response to the impacts on Early Head Start families of new requirements in State welfare reform initiatives. Let me briefly share several examples of how local agencies mold services to fit family needs and community resources.

Child Development, Inc., a comprehensive non-profit early childhood agency serves families in rural Arkansas through a series of centers that provide quality child care, including services that accommodate the needs of parents who work evening and early morning shifts in the local poultry industry or who attend night classes at local universities and community colleges. United Cerebral Palsy of Washington, D.C. and Northern Virginia offers parents a choice among a home visitor service, a network of family child care homes, and a child care center. These options allow parents the flexibility to continue to participate in Early Head Start as their schedules change due to employment demands and education opportunities.

#### Stimulating New Initiatives

Two other agencies illustrate the potential of Early Head Start to mobilize additional community resources to complement federal funds. The University of Pittsburgh's program has mobilized unusual linkages to expand health services to its families and



target neighborhoods. The University's Medical School supports a therapeutic child care center to serve infants and toddlers with severe disabilities. Other Early Head Start sites are linked with community health centers that offer comprehensive prenatal care, dental services and health care for families with infants and toddlers, funded with other State and community resources. These centers serve both Early Head Start families and the community as a whole.

The Brattleboro Town School District in Vermont provides a rich array of services including home visits, family literacy and substance abuse treatment, special outreach to fathers, and a child care center at the local high school. The program generates more than \$500,000 from State and local governments, local foundations and businesses, including a partnership with the First Vermont Bank which administers a revolving, low-interest loan fund to help families establish credit and progress toward economic self-sufficiency. In another new partnership venture in Brattleboro, Early Head Start serves as the local arm of Vermont's welfare reform and job training agencies. This arrangement reduces administrative costs and makes it easier for families to gain access to these State resources.

Since 1965 Head Start has blazed a trail for our Nation by showing the benefits of high quality, comprehensive early childhood services. Many States and communities have built on

the example and principles of Head Start to create new public and private initiatives to serve preschool children and their families. Head Start has spread the word and shown the way through research, through national efforts to set standards and create materials, and through the everyday example of Head Start staff members making a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children, families and neighborhoods.

I expect that Early Head Start will play a similar role in stimulating other public and private initiatives for infants and toddlers. Toward that end, we are beginning a new emphasis on partnerships with other public and private agencies involved in child care, health services, community development, and education reform. We are reaching out to work with State and local governments to stimulate others to invent their own ways to provide more young children with the opportunity for safe, healthy development and learning. For example, last month we announced the beginning of a five-year \$16 million public-private partnership with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to provide intensive training to local staff teams in working with infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. This initiative will strengthen Early Head Start services as well as stimulate improvements in other local programs. We are also working closely with States such as Oklahoma, Kansas and Minnesota as they design State programs based on the Early Head Start model and performance standards.

I appreciate this opportunity to report on our accomplishments and the exciting efforts of local Early Head Start programs and look forward to answering your questions.