

**Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education
Supporting HB 1004 – Prekindergarten Education**
Given by Erin Macey, Policy Analyst, Indiana Institute for Working Families
January 31, 2017

Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee.

My name is Erin Macey, as a former teacher, a mother, and a policy analyst at Indiana Institute for Working Families, I am here to express appreciation to Representative Behning and the committee for considering an increased investment in early childhood education. The mission of the Institute is to help Hoosier families achieve and maintain economic self-sufficiency and we see investments in early childhood education as an important two-generation strategy toward that goal.

You've heard plenty about the data on that, so I'll cut to the chase.

We saw already that supply is not meeting the need and I expect that the 66% you saw does not reflect family members who would like to be working and would like to purchase high-quality opportunities for their kids but cannot because the math just doesn't work and the supports are not always there.

So want to see the state maximize the number of seats available. And we want to make sure that some of our most economically challenged families continue to have access to Head Start to ensure that the state is supplementing rather than supplanting Head Start dollars.

Head Start currently bring approximately \$126 million into the state to provide early childhood education programming AND whole-family support to over 19,000 children birth to age five (including over 7000 high-quality prek seats). This year, 26 program received additional funding to work toward full day, full year programming. These are federal-to-local dollars that we stand to lose if Head Start seats are not filled. Other states have included provisions in their preschool legislation to help ensure the full utilization of Head Start and we would like to see something similar here.

Cheryl Miller, Executive Director of the Indiana Head Start Association, will fill you in today on why Head Start is so important for the families they serve, so I just want to quickly share with you the testimony of some of the parents and staff I shared when I asked them what they want their legislators to know about Head Start:

- A Head Start staff member in Lebanon, Indiana said, "Head Start makes changes with the families as well as the children. We work so closely with the families that they feel comfortable coming into the classroom which prepares them when their children go to kindergarten." In fact, over 21,000 Hoosier parents volunteered in Head Start classrooms each year and research suggests that they remain more engaged during the K-12 years.

- I heard the story of a mom in New Castle who served on Head Start’s policy council there. The experience of engaging with other parents and community members around issues affecting their school and their children – one that is offered in every Head Start - gave her the confidence to go back to school and ultimately attain a bachelor’s degree
- A family advocate – the name for those who partner with the families to work on *their* goals – shared excitedly that one of her families had been able to secure stable employment and that she (the family advocate) was connecting them with a class in the community on how to prepare to buy their first home – at the time, they were living with the grandparents.
- A veteran teacher of 28 years at the Head Start in Bloomington shared “We’re not just getting them ready for kindergarten. We’re not just focusing on the educational aspects. But I think that we give, or try to give, the kids those life skills that they can use to be better learners, to be better friends, to be better people when they grow up. And so, I think it’s more important for us to teach problem solving and critical thinking and how to make choices.”

So in conclusion I ask the committee to be generous in its investment in early childhood education, and to ensure that strong coordination with Head Start is an integral part of the way we help move Hoosier families to self-sufficiency. Thank you for your time.