



April 21, 2021

The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 96814

The Honorable Frank Bigelow
Vice Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 4158
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Head Start California Opposition Letter to AB 22 (McCarty)

Dear Assemblymembers Gonzalez and Bigelow,

Head Start California is the advocacy organization representing the 147 Head Start grantees in California. Collectively, we represent over 2,000 programs sites in the state, serving 100,000 children and families. We are writing to express our strong **opposition** to AB 22 (McCarty), which would expand transitional kindergarten to all 4-year-olds. While we appreciate the bill's intent to ensure that children are ready to thrive when they enter a public school system, we believe there are unintended consequences that will arise as a result of implementation of AB 22 that would harm, not help, California's low-income children and families.

This bill does not address what at-risk children need.

Four-year-old children are not developmentally ready to be in a more traditional elementary school setting or program which would cause multiple transitions and disruptions during the day to move them to other programs to meet the full day needs of their families. Children this age need consistency, attachment and a nurturing environment who can manage not only their early learning, but also their social and emotional development and basic self-regulation skills. To be blunt, these children need naps and care.

This bill does not address if low-income 4-year-olds who continue to be eligible for State Preschool or Head Start programs can receive the wraparound services provided through those

programs. Wraparound services include counseling, crisis care and outreach, special education services and tutoring, health services, legal services, and family support.

Additionally, high student-teacher ratios in transitional kindergarten would make it difficult to properly teach 4-year-olds. When there is a lower student-to-teacher ratio, currently 1 to 8 in Head Start and State Preschool, students receive more attention from their teachers. Teachers themselves have more manageable workloads as they have fewer students to keep track of, which in turn translates into them having more time to spend one-on-one with students.

Furthermore, this bill does not fully address the training requirements that K-12 teachers will need to serve 4-year-olds. While the bill does contain a requirement for teachers to receive training in early education, the 24 units as required by AB 22 cannot compare to the extensive training like teachers in Head Start programs undergo to qualify as a teacher. For example, Head Start teachers must have a *minimum* of a Child Development Associate's Degree or equivalent credential *and* have been trained in early childhood development with a focus on infant and toddler development.

This bill does not address what parents need to work.

AB 22 does not require transitional kindergarten to provide a full-day and full year program, nor does it ensure students who attend transitional kindergarten will have access to full-day programs, as recommended in the Blue Ribbon Commission Report. *But this is what parents need.* For parents to work, they need childcare options that are flexible and convenient for families and that meet their individual needs. Overnight grocery store workers will need a different schedule than those who work in offices or retail stores – none of these schedules that include nights, weekends and 10-hour work days align with the typical 'K-12 school' day. Family work schedules in California are just as diverse as our population.

The early learning and care system cannot survive an expansion of TK.

Expanding TK will create challenges for a system already taxed by the pandemic. *Almost 7,000 family childcare homes shut their doors between March and December, 2,443 permanently, according to the California Department of Social Services.*

- ***Expansion will drain an already lean workforce.*** This bill would create the need for more qualified staff which are already difficult to recruit and retain. This is partly due to an underfunded system that undervalues and underpays the workforce. In addition, school districts, which typically pay higher wages, will attract qualified staff, and thus create a challenge for non-LEA based providers.
- ***TK Expansion could put Federal funding at risk.*** The rising minimum wage has made Head Start income-eligible families harder to identify. Under-enrollment can lead to reductions in future funding, which will negatively impact the strong collaboration that exists between Head Start and State Preschool. California should maximize the Federal Head Start investment in California, or risk displacing Federal dollars with state funds. We agree with the Master Plan recommendation to “Implement a statewide centralized system to prioritize the provision

of child care resources to members of high-risk groups...” to ensure that families who qualify for state and federal subsidized care can make informed choices.

AB 22 takes funding away from child care.

COVID-19 has brought child care into sharp focus on both the state and federal landscapes, leading to billions in *one-time* relief dollars to support access to child care for working families as well as providing family child care providers some stipend relief. In contrast, this bill takes child care dollars from the General Fund (GF) and places them under Proposition 98. Proposition 98 gets 40 percent of the state budget. Child care that supports infants, toddlers and subsidized families including those with children up to age 13 is funded *at less than 4 percent of the state budget*. Worse, this shifting of child care dollars from the GF *will be permanent*. So when current emergency-allocated child care dollars are expended, California will be left with *less overall child care dollars* compared to funding levels prior to the pandemic. Instead, California should invest the capacity of the already-strong collaboration among state preschool, private providers and Head Start programs to offer families full-day / full-year and non-traditional hours of care, as recommended in the Blue-Ribbon Commission Report.

This is not good timing.

Transitional Kindergarten *may* be part of the solution in providing access to early learning and care to more of California’s children, but it is not *the only* solution. And it is *not now*. There are several recommendations in the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care that must be addressed before initiating so dramatic a change. We need to align and leverage the strength of our current system *before we can expand it*. We urge you to reject AB 22 and instead, direct resources and efforts towards alignment and coordination called for in the Master Plan.

Sincerely,



Jamie C. Mauhay, Esq.
Director, External & Governmental Affairs
Head Start California

Cc:

The Honorable Gavin Newsom, Governor, State of California
The Honorable Toni G. Atkins, President pro Tempore, California State Senate
The Honorable Anthony Rendon, Speaker, California State Assembly
The Honorable Kevin McCarty, Assemblymember
Members, Assembly Education Committee
Members, Senate Education Committee