

Why child care, Head Start funding DO belong in the stimulus package [US] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS On a recent broadcast of The News Hour with Jim Lehrer, a national newspaper columnist remarked, "Head Start does not belong in the economic recovery package." In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. In today's world, most parents work outside the home and a majority of children are taken care of by someone other than their parents on a regular basis. The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies reports that 70 percent of U.S. women with children are in the labor force, 75 percent work more than 30 hours a week and 90 percent use some type of child care. Single-parent U.S. households doubled between 1970 and 1990, but even where women are part of a dual-earner household, their financial contributions are very significant to the well-being of the family. Child care can be very expensive, however, and not just for low-income families. In New York state the fees are among the highest in the nation. Locally, child care for a single 4-year-old child can be more than \$12,000 annually - almost double the yearly tuition at a SUNY institution. Infant care may exceed \$17,000. High-income families also find their child-care expenses daunting, especially if more than one of their children needs care. In many households, the child-care bill is second only to the mortgage or rent payment. Working parents rely on programs like Head Start, a free, comprehensive preschool program aimed at increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families, and the Child Care Development Block Grant, which provides child-care financial assistance to working families, to care for their children while they work. Yet, despite the increasing needs of working families, New York serves 46,000 fewer children in child care than four years ago. The state's funding for child care dropped from a high of \$929 million in fiscal year 2004-05 to \$906 million this year. Nationally, Head Start experienced an effective cut of 13 percent from fiscal year 2002 to 2008, forcing some programs to reduce their hours of operation, cut back support services and reduce staff benefits. ... For many families, the alternatives to affordable, quality child care provided by programs like Head Start and CCDBG are giving up their jobs, reducing their work hours or leaving their children in unsafe or substandard arrangements. Clearly these are not acceptable options. Not for our families and not for our country. As of this writing, the current stimulus package being discussed in Washington includes significant increases for both Head Start and CCDBG. Such investments are wise components of any viable economic recovery plan. In the short term, access to affordable child care will make it possible for parents to get back to work. In the long term, and perhaps more importantly, children who experience Head Start and other quality child-care programs will be better prepared to join our work force in the future. Addressing the immediate needs of working families while delivering expanded investments in our most important capital resource is a smart move - even if not fully understood by all the pundits. - reprinted from The Journal News

Region: United States ^[2]

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mother's labour force participation ^[4]

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