

**Senators Reverend Raphael Warnock and Shelley Capito Early Head Start:
Head Start Education and Development Workforce Advancement and Yield Act**

Policy Background

Post-pandemic staffing shortages have significantly hindered the ability of Early Head Start classrooms to serve at-risk children from birth through age two. A September 2022 survey by the National Head Start Association revealed that 77% of respondents reported higher-than-usual staff vacancies, with 66% noting a lack of candidates with the required qualifications. Approximately 15% of Early Head Start and Early Head Start staff positions are vacant nationwide.

While low wages contribute to staffing shortages, a considerable obstacle is a requirement for all Early Head Start classroom teachers to hold the necessary Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. However, the CDA is typically obtained after finding employment in the early childhood education field, resulting in a limited pool of fully qualified candidates ready for Early Head Start classroom jobs.

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, the most recent reauthorization of Early Head Start and Early Head Start, established teacher degrees and credential requirements. This included a requirement for most Head Start lead teachers to hold bachelor's degrees and a CDA credential requirement for all Early Head Start teachers. Congress included this provision to ensure high-quality teaching in the nation's Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms.

Although these heightened requirements acknowledged the significance of training and expertise in early childhood education, they were not accompanied by a corresponding salary increase. In fact, Early Head Start teachers with an associate's degree currently earn an average of \$35,985, whereas those with a CDA earn \$30,214. Those without a CDA earn just \$26,763.

Furthermore, the credentialing requirement presents an additional barrier for individuals interested in working with young children during a time of extreme staffing shortages. Obtaining a CDA certification is not free, and individuals often have to pay out of pocket before they can teach without earning any income. Working in Early Head Start is considered a stepping stone for those interested in this field, particularly for women with children already enrolled. The CDA credential serves as a starting point for career advancement in early childhood education, offering growth opportunities and professional development while balancing work responsibilities amidst the low wages in the profession.

About the HEADWAY Act

This legislation would respond to widespread early childcare workforce shortages, which have reduced Early Head Start slots for children. The bill would primarily:

- Permit some Early Head Start classroom teachers to be in the process of earning their CDA credential while retaining the requirement that at least one teacher in every classroom is fully credentialed with at least a CDA.
- Require mentorship within the program to facilitate and ensure continued progress toward earning the CDA.