Dear Congressman Grijalva:

As you know, early childhood literacy programs are a critical part of Head Start’s effort to aid in a child’s intellectual development. Public libraries across the country are effective partners in this effort by providing early learning activities that are critical for later language acquisition, learning and literacy to infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers and their families.

As centers of lifelong learning, libraries have a strong tradition of serving families with young children, caregivers and educators. Across the country public libraries are already partnering with local Head Start centers to offer services such as: regularly scheduled storytimes; literacy training for Head Start staff; bookmobiles to Head Start centers; and programs for parents and caregivers. In many communities, librarians also serve as community representatives on local Head Start Boards.

In Mohave County in Arizona, the library provides books to take home after the monthly storytime. Head Start staff report that these books are often the only books in the home. The librarians chose books that are age appropriate and that they believe might be of interest to parents for whom English is their second language.

The Grand Rapids Michigan Public Libraries have had a special collaboration with the Kent County Head Start since 1996. Each branch librarian holds a storytime for the Head Start center closest to the branch library. After each storytime, children are sent home with a project to work on that is intended to increase verbal skills, increase social skills, and introduce reading skills.

The Tuolumne County Library in California operates their Worlds of Wonder (WOW) bookmobile to reach underserved families, especially those with children who are five and under. Three days a week, it travels with a Born-to-Read specialist to preschools and Head Start centers to encourage the concept of reading to young children and using books as a way for families to interact, communicate, and have fun together.

Since 1994, Oakland Head Start and the Oakland Public Library in California have partnered to offer Books for Wider Horizons, which recruits, trains, and places volunteer story readers at twenty-two Oakland Head Start centers. The literacy program introduces children to the joys of
reading, increases children's reading readiness, and encourages the use of the library by Head Start pre-schoolers and their families.

Targeting a multi-lingual population in Yuba City, California, the Sutter County Library's Born-to-Read program involves four health care agencies and 11 community organizations including the local Migrant Head Start Program. Activities include a major public awareness campaign, parenting programs, infant and parent storytimes and Born-to-Read graduation celebrations at various community sites.

The Wichita, Kansas Public Library collaborates with Wichita Head Start and Early Head Start. The Outreach Librarian reads stories 4 times a year at each Head Start site (95 storytimes programs in 2006). Three Head Start programs benefit from a "Books to Go" program, which lends a box of books to the site each month for use in the classroom. A total of 536 books were checked out to these three sites in 2006. One Head Start is located in the same building with a branch library and those children join the librarian weekly for storytime.

These are just a few examples of the special relationships that exist between public libraries and Head Start classrooms. By recognizing the important role that public libraries play in improving literacy and school readiness in the Head Start reauthorization bill, libraries across the country can continue to develop new, innovative programs to provide young children with the tools they need to succeed in school and life.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment in the role of our nation’s public libraries in developing a literate, educated, and democratic society. Please do not hesitate to contact the American Library Association or me should you need any additional assistance as the reauthorization process moves forward.

Sincerely,

Emily Sheketoff
Executive Director, American Library Association

cc: Members of the House Education and Labor Committee