



Black Leaders Making History Carry the Head Start Legacy



National Head Start Association 1 day ago · 4 min read



This Black History Month, NHSA has been reflecting on the deeply intertwined roots of Head Start and the Civil Rights Movement, sharing the stories of early Head Start leaders who persevered to keep the program running despite opposition to its integrated, progressive goals. Now, as the month nears its end, we look towards the future and

acknowledge the Black voices making history as Head Start champions today. From members of Congress to the new Office of Head Start Director, Head Start allies and alumni carry on the program's Civil Rights legacy.

The new Congress is the most diverse in American history with 128 lawmakers who identify as Black, Native American, Asian American, or Hispanic. Among them are Head Start alumni **Senator Rev. Raphael Warnock** of Georgia and **Congresswoman Jahana Hayes** of Connecticut. Senator Warnock made history this year when he was elected the first Black senator from Georgia. And Congresswoman Jahana Hayes has been representing Head Start's legacy in Congress since 2018 when she became the first Black woman to represent Connecticut.

Senator Rev. Raphael Warnock



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In an interview in January, Senator Warnock reflected on his historic election and what it means for low-income families whose background he shares. “I am delighted that the people have chosen me to represent them in the state of Georgia,” he said. “I want to say to some kid who is struggling, families across Georgia, that you are looking at an iteration of the American Dream.” Senator Warnock shared that he is a “product of progress” and got to where he is through hard work, but also good public policy. “As a toddler I was in Head Start,” he explained. “I know the importance of good federal public policy, and in this defining moment in America when there’s so much suffering and there’s so many people trying to divide us, I hope to go to the U.S. Senate and be a force for good...as we build what Dr. King called the beloved community of ordinary people.”

Congresswoman Jahana Hayes



At the 2020 Winter Leadership Institute, NHSA's Executive Director Yasmina Vinci and Board Chairman Damon Carson present Congresswoman Jahana Hayes with the Pledge Award.

Congresswoman Hayes has also reflected on her Head Start roots. “Head Start was where I first developed my love of learning and the idea that I could learn,” she shared at NHSA’s 2020 Winter Leadership Institute. “And that’s where I really grew to learn the concept of ‘it takes a village.’ And that has been my educational philosophy. Every time someone says ‘the school should do this...’ No, it’s the community, it’s the entire community that should be investing in children.”

Before coming to Congress, Representative Hayes was an award-winning teacher. “When I got a student in my class as a high schooler, I

could immediately identify who had child care access, who was a Head Start student,” she says. “Their skills were different, their language was different, their verbal acquisition was different, and that followed them all the way into their high school years. It cannot be replaced.” Her experiences in the classroom, as a Head Start student and as a teacher, are reflected in her work in Congress as a champion for educational equity.

Dr. Bernadine Futrell, Director of the Office of Head Start



And the big news of this week is that Head Start’s legacy is represented at a high level of yet another branch of government, with Dr. Bernadine Futrell’s appointment as Director of the Office of Head Start. NHSA’s now-former Senior Director for Effective Practice, Dr. Futrell, is the first Head Start alumna to be appointed to this role, where she will oversee

Head Start and Early Head Start. “The National Head Start Association congratulates our dear colleague Dr. Bernadine Futrell on her appointment to the helm of the Office of Head Start,” NHSA Executive Director Yasmina Vinci said. “Dr. Futrell, herself a Head Start graduate and a testament to the strong foundation the program lays for success in school and in life, is a mission-driven, innovative leader and we look forward to working with her to continue taking Head Start to new heights.” From attending the program to leading it, Dr. Futrell is a true testament to Head Start’s impact!

This Black History Month, we celebrate these leaders who represent Head Start’s legacy, and now use their platforms at the national level to ensure a strong future legacy for Head Start.

[Head Start](#)[Black History Month](#)[Education](#)[Politics](#)