

## **Astor Highlights Sequestrations Cuts to Head Start**



Astor Services for Children and Families displayed empty chairs outside each of its centers yesterday signifying the loss of Head Start slots due to Sequestration budget cuts.

Monday September 9, 2013

Astor Services for Children and Families displayed 118 empty seats outside their Head Start program in Poughkeepsie yesterday. They represented the 86 Dutchess County children who lost opportunities to participate Head Start and Early Head Start this year – and the 22 employees who lost their jobs -- as a result of Federal "Sequestration" budget cuts. Astor provides all of Dutchess County's Head Start and Early Head Start programming at six centers located in Poughkeepsie, Wappingers Falls, Millerton, Red Hook, Beacon, Wingdale and Pine Plains. And all of the centers were effected.

Nationally, the Federal cuts mandated by last year's congressional budget deadlock slashed \$405 million dollars from the program -- a 5.7% cut. Across New York State, it is estimated that 3,847 children will lose the opportunity to services.

"In Dutchess County, this cut resulted in a \$340,000 reduction in funding, which means that 86 youngsters in the county will no longer be receiving services at our Head Start and Early Head Start Centers. Funding remains for only 563 children," said Mary Sontheimer, Assistant Executive Director, Astor's Early Childhood Programs. "Our program sustained what is essentially a nine percent cut because of how our budget year falls. We had to reduce expenses for an entire year in less than six months."

"Our staff worked with the Parent Council in an effort to find ways to make cuts that would have the least impact," says Sonia Barnes-Moorhead, Executive Vice President of the Children's Foundation of Astor. "We had to cut transportation and close classrooms. We lost 52 Head Start seats and 34 Early Head Start seats. Many of our staff took unpaid furloughs this summer."

Parents, staff, volunteers, and legislators, including NYS Senator Terry Gipson and Assemblymember Frank Skardatos, were on hand to express their support. “We want to send the message out that these budget cuts are affecting our most vulnerable families,” said Sontheimer.

Pawling resident Mary Ann Ashby’s 4-year-old daughter, Adonyia Robinson, was one of a dozen children who could no longer attend the Head Start Program in Wingdale when the cuts went into effect. Ashby said the loss was devastating. “Adonyia cried and told me how much she missed her teachers and the other children,” she explained. “She was learning a lot. She was really being prepared to go to Kindergarten.”

Unless a federal budget deal is reached, this year’s cuts will only grow worse next year as Sequestration mandates deeper and deeper across-the-board budget reductions.

<http://www.nynp.biz/index.php/nonprofit-events/16969-astor-highlights-sequestrations-cuts-to-head-start->