

Dear Ms Salazar,

The Hidalgo County Head Start has a different mandate from that of any other County Department. We take care of children. Seven day a week all year long, we must deliver children, food, supplies and services to 43 centers stretched throughout 1,749 square miles of the County's service area. We must be able to deliver services in time and within the appropriate federal, state and local regulations

We have always complied with of the County's policies and procedures and up to the date of these new policies being implemented we were able to comply without jeopardizing services and funding.

In our efforts to comply with the Hidalgo County Fuel Card Policy we have encountered the following issues which need to be resolved:

1. We have 31 buses in our transportation fleet and we transport approximately 600 children every day. Some of our bus drivers conduct two routes in the morning and two routes in the afternoon and some of our routes are long. These routes require that the drivers fill up several times per day and the total amount per monthly charges per bus exceeds \$500. *We are requesting that our drivers be allowed to fill up at least 4 times per week and that the maximum charges per bus be increased to a maximum of \$1,700 per month.*
2. There are 32 delivery vans and trucks which are on the road everyday delivering the mail, supplies, meals to the children as well as attending to the maintenance of our 43 facilities. The meals are delivered twice a day every day. These vehicles also require between 3 to 4 fill ups per week. *We are requesting that these drivers also be allowed to fill up 3 to 4 times per week and that the maximum charges per vehicle be increased to a maximum of \$1000.00 per month.*
3. We continue to have high turnover rate of bus drivers and van drivers. The replacing of employees in these positions has been very difficult given the fact that our funding has not allowed for us to keep up with competitive salaries to attract and retain staff. When we find an employee that meets our criteria, we place him/her on the job as soon as the employee is cleared with drug testing. The transportation of children affects our attendance and thus our funding when we are not providing transportation services. The new process for approving the issuance of fuel cards, as explained to me, will require at least two weeks after the individual driver is submitted to the Purchasing Department for training and assignment of a card and a code to use the gas cards. *This process, as I understand it, sounds like it will be counter productive to the service delivery of The Head Start Program as it could interfere with the transportation of children to the centers. If this is the case, it will create a negative domino effect that will impact attendance negatively and thus placing our funding in jeopardy. It will also interfere with the delivery of meals, supplies and the mail to the 43 centers. We need help in resolving this issue. We need to be able to get approval for the card and the code on the same day that the driver is reporting to work.*

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While we are making every effort to comply with this policy, the set procedures need to be reviewed based on the fact that we are dealing with childcare and social services and these fuel card procedures are impacting the services to 3,570 children and the jobs of over 750 employees.

We ask for your guidance and assistance in arriving at a procedure that will be sensitive to needs of children and families of Hidalgo County. Your immediate attention to this matter is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Teresa Flores,
Head Start Executive Director

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