



September 16, 2024

The Honorable Tom Cole, Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-307 The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
S-128 The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1036 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins, Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
S-146 The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman Cole, Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Ranking Member Collins:

**Next week, hundreds of Head Start leaders, parents, and advocates will descend on Capitol Hill as the collective voice of children and families in deep need of quality early learning opportunities.**

They will speak for children and families struggling to get by with incomes below the federal poverty level.

They will speak for children in foster care.

They will speak for children and families experiencing homelessness.

They will speak for migrant farm workers and their families who put food on America's tables.

They will speak for Indigenous children and their families who have lived on American soil since time immemorial.

And they will speak for children and families dealing with incarceration, parents trying to obtain a General Educational Development (GED) certification or even a college degree, and underpaid military families who can't afford child care.

Head Start touches or serves every congressional district in our great country. Increasingly, however, **Head Start is being made available to fewer and fewer children because early childhood educators—after years of often poverty-level wages—are looking for careers elsewhere.** Viable classrooms are closed because programs can't find or pay qualified personnel. This is particularly true in small communities and rural areas. Children are on waitlists for Head Start programs because teachers aren't available.

**We need your leadership to reverse this trend.**

Our organizations have persistently advocated for funding for annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) so staff don't fall further behind economically, for quality improvement funding (QIF) to address critical local needs, including deferred maintenance issues to provide a more welcoming and nurturing environment for children and staff; and to expand the number of teachers culturally and linguistically suited to address the growing need for Head Start and Early Head Start services in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

We are grateful for the Senate's inclusion of \$544 million for a Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) COLA, a QIF increase of \$125 million, and \$10 million for the Tribal Colleges and Universities–Head Start Partnership Program. We strongly urge the House to agree to the higher Senate funding level for FY25 which recognizes the very real economic headwinds Head Start programs face. Asking Head Start teachers, administrators, kitchen staff, classroom aides, and bus drivers to make less when they're already behind service sector jobs completely misses the mark. We can, and must, do better.

**We appreciate the work of the Senate Appropriations Committee for helping hold the line. Unfortunately, however, holding the line looks increasingly like falling behind.**

The Supporting the Head Start Workforce and Consistent Quality Programming Rule (ACF-OHS-PI-24-05), published on August 21, 2024, makes several reforms designed to improve Head Start programs. We welcome the overall goals of the rule, including a collaborative approach between the Office of Head Start and local programs to better support child health and safety and create a safer classroom environment for both children and staff despite soaring child trauma and adverse childhood behaviors and experiences. And we greatly appreciate that local control and autonomy, a hallmark of Head Start since its beginning, will be preserved.

Most notably, the rule calls for significant increases in wages and benefits for Head Start staff, with exemptions for small programs that serve approximately eight percent of Head Start children. **While the published rule notes that full implementation will cost nearly \$1.5 billion annually through FY33, it provides no funding to do so, instead leaving that up to Congress.** Our organizations are concerned that, if this and future Congresses do not provide the funding necessary to implement the rule, the rule's impact could prove devastating—significantly reducing the number of children and families served by Head Start.

**Therefore, in addition to the Senate's bipartisan inclusion of \$700 million above FY24 funding, we urge Congress to begin to plan and budget for implementation of the rule by making a down payment of an additional \$251 million for implementation of the rule as detailed in Table I2 on page 67799 of the Federal Register<sup>1</sup>.** We recognize that the FY25 appropriations cycle, including committee allocations, has been underway for months, while the rule was finalized just last month, but programs must begin closing the substantial gap between their current salary structures and what the rule requires.

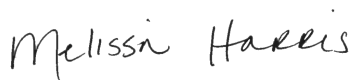
Investing in Head Start remains a prudent course of action, setting in motion the future success of millions of children, families, and their communities. The \$13,222,820,000 FY25 investment outlined above will support the Head Start workforce, moving toward the resources needed to pay a living and competitive wage and letting those who will speak and be spoken for next week know that Congress intends to properly resource Head Start.

**Thank you for your consideration and support.**

Sincerely,



Yasmina S. Vinci  
Executive Director  
National Head Start Association



Melissa Harris  
President  
National Indian Head Start  
Directors Association



Cleo Rodríguez, Jr.  
Executive Director  
National Migrant and Seasonal  
Head Start Association

cc: House Appropriations Committee Members  
Senate Appropriations Committee Members

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2024-08-21/pdf/2024-18279.pdf>