



Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.



## The Impact of Proposed Budget Cuts to Head Start

**A proposed \$750 million budget cut to Head Start would leave roughly 80,000 fewer children with access to Head Start and Early Head Start.**

The \$750 million in proposed cuts to Head Start and Early Head Start included in the House Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations Subcommittee FY24 bill would have a devastating impact – when combined with the impact of inflation, roughly 80,000 fewer children and their families would lose access to the life changing services of Head Start. In addition, workforce shortages would be exacerbated due to continued under-compensation, and the additional services that make Head Start and Early Head Start a powerful intervention for children from the most at-risk backgrounds would have to be curtailed.

The National Head Start Association reached out to programs across the country to ask what the impact of a 10% budget cut would have on their programs. The following are some of their replies.

### Impact on Children

Today's Head Start and Early Head Start children were mostly born during or after the pandemic. The resulting economic, social, and emotional upheaval continues to be reflected in what teachers are seeing among the children in their classrooms. The additional needs of children have required more intensive work to help them cope appropriately with trauma and catch up developmentally with their peers. Budget cuts would significantly hamper this work.

**From the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Washington...** “Currently, 20% of our enrollment is receiving special services, this is three times the rate of a normal year. Behavior issues for children are off the charts, parents are frustrated, teachers are frustrated, and children are frustrated. If we have to dial back teaching staff we will inevitably continue to increase health/safety issues.”

**In Sycamore, Illinois...** “Children are entering programs seriously behind, with the lowest scores I have seen during my tenure. Below are the percentages of children who are meeting age-based expectations at the time they enter our Head Start.

- Social Emotional 24.7%
- Language 22.3%
- Physical 19.5%
- Cognitive 15.2%
- Literacy 4.9%
- Mathematics 2.5%

**In Palm Spring, Florida...** “Twenty-six percent of our children receive mental health and/or behavioral health services, with a focus on speech language therapy (68%) and other therapies for developmental delays or behavior (32%).”

**In Forest Hills, New York...** “The pandemic supports have come to an end but the programs are reeling with the aftermath with children entering classrooms at a lower developmental level and behavior challenges. Additional staffing is needed for the safety of all in addition to the success of the children's academic journey.”

## Impact on the Number of Children Able to Be Served

The need for Head Start and Early Head Start has never been greater, but one immediate impact of budget cuts will be the reduction in the number of children able to be served. Because fixed costs don't change much with changes in enrollment, the impact of these cuts would be disproportionately borne by children.

***In Kern County, California...*** “This funding reduction would impact services to 36 children ages 0-5 years of age in the community. Migrants families that work primarily in agriculture would be forced to locate other child care options that may not be safe or provide quality services. The total estimated financial impact would be roughly \$462K for South Kern County.”

***In Paintsville, Kentucky...*** “With a 10% reduction in funding, we could assume that we would have to suspend services to around 15% (167) of the children we serve and around 20 employees.”

***In Houston, Alabama...*** “A 10% cut would mean closing at least 6 classrooms leading to approximately 88 children losing child care slots, 10 teachers losing their jobs, and approximately 12 support staff losing their jobs. These 88 children would miss 31,680 warm meals normally served during the school year and 15,840 snacks.”

***In Woonsocket, Rhode Island...*** “Twenty-eight percent of Head Start classrooms are closed in the state due to the inability to pay an appropriate wage. Permanent closure of these classrooms would result in a loss of 628 high-quality early childhood education seats for children from birth to five (540 Head Start, and 88 Early Head Start).”

***In Bath, Maine...*** “We'd be unable to open 16 [Early Head Start] classrooms which would translate into approximately 100 children not receiving two meals a day, not receiving the medical care we provide, and not having the education they so badly need to escape the generational poverty so many in Maine endure.”

## Impact on Services

Research is clear that comprehensive services – health and wellness screenings, transportation, nutrition support, and family support – play a key role in the success of the Head Start model in preparing young children for success in school and in life. Those services are likely to be curtailed in many programs facing budget cuts as well as the impact of inflation.

***In Chattanooga, Tennessee...*** “Rising food costs have made it more difficult to provide nutritious meals. Diapers and formula prices have gone up 40%.”

***In Rock Falls, Illinois...*** “A 10% cut could eliminate ALL transportation and food service staff throughout the program, an estimated 41 positions. Ending transportation services to and from school for families. Require food service to be built into remaining positions. It would be devastating. It would change the design of our program. It would no longer meet the needs of our communities.”

***In Macon, Georgia...*** “Reduced funding would also lead to other staff and program cuts within the transportation department, resulting in nearly 300 children not having transportation to and from school.”

## Impact on the Workforce

Early childhood education is among the lowest ten percent of professions by salary. Not only is there no room to curtail salaries as a belt-tightening measure, but current insufficient pay is resulting in intractable turnover and understaffing problems, as potential employees are opting for other jobs that offer better support for themselves and their families. The current Head Start workforce challenges were outlined in a [series of issue briefs](#) over the past year.

***In Lincoln, Nebraska...*** “This year a number of teachers have experienced homelessness and food insecurity.”

***In Aurora, Illinois...*** “Kentucky Fried Chicken is offering \$25 per hour but we are only able to offer teachers with degrees between \$19-20 per hour.”

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**In Chadron, Nebraska...** “Our nonprofit of about 70 employees has encountered a significant increase of approximately 40% in health insurance costs over the past year, adding to the financial burden.”

**In Wasilla/Palmer, Alaska...** “Our wages are already far behind the school district. For example, at our program, a starting teacher with a degree earns \$36,884. With the same degree, the starting wage at our local school district is \$51,554. Our entry level positions (such as substitute teachers) earn \$14.57/hr. The entry level wage at Target in Wasilla is \$17.25/hr. Our benefits are not even in the same ballpark as the school district or these retail giants. We are completely reliant on federal funding to have wages that allow us to recruit and retain staff. Our last federal increase was 5.6% which is the largest I have ever seen, but inflation in Alaska in the year prior was 8.1%. Target increased wages 4 times over that year. We will make one 5.6% increase starting on August 1 and we won't be able to make another increase until August 1, 2024 - IF Congress and the Administration make it so.”

## Impact on Facilities

There is a direct link between child well-being and their physical surroundings. Yet budget cuts also result in deferred maintenance and renovations, even on buildings as much as 100 years old that are in urgent need of upgrades. This was outlined in a [2015 HHS report](#), and the problem has not been systematically addressed since then. Additionally, leased or loaned space can be difficult to keep in an environment with rising rents and high demand.

**In San Antonio, Texas...** “After the Uvalde massacre, a consultant was hired to assess all of our facilities and provide a report on each. We know what the needs are but are unable to proceed with taking care of these needs due to the lack of funding.”

**In Clarksdale, Mississippi...** “Challenges include maintaining older modular units that have seen the cost to maintain steadily rise but the funding to maintain the facilities has not risen along with this cost.”

**In Corpus Christi, Texas...** “Currently, some facilities need major roofing and exterior ramp repairs, and we need to find a facility on the south side of Corpus Christi with affordable rent. At this time we do not have facilities in areas where there is a wait list.”

**In Honolulu, Hawaii...** “The cost of rent is on the rise; we had to give up three Head Start classrooms on public school campuses because principals needed the space back; we had to move out of two Early Head Start classrooms, that we use through a lease agreement, because one site closed down during the pandemic and the other site went through renovations with no guarantee we could return.”

## Impact on Quality

Head Start children thrive when given the opportunity to learn and grow in a cultural context that is meaningful to them and their communities. Budget cuts would curtail the ability to provide essential program components that foster a love of learning from the youngest ages.

**In Kingston, Washington...** “The largest impact on our tribal community would be reducing our ability to purchase materials needed to practice cultural traditions. When we aren't able to purchase the materials needed for our children and families to weave with wool, or make their own drums, we are contributing to a loss of culture.”

**In New Haven, Connecticut...** “We are seeing an increase in children's developmental delays, and this closure to classrooms [due to budget cuts] would have a negative impact on children's long term success in school, delaying support services especially for children with special needs, as well as allowing their families support and opportunities to work or participate in job training.”

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