



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

November 9, 2023

The Honorable Mike Johnson  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

cc: House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries  
Members of the House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Congratulations on your recent election as the 56th Speaker of the House. On behalf of the Head Start community, we wish you well and look forward to working with you in your new role.

Head Start and Early Head Start (collectively referred to here as Head Start) provide education, health, and nutrition services to young children from at-risk backgrounds—those living in poverty, in foster care, or experiencing homelessness—as well as offer job preparation, parenting skills, and educational support to parents at those critical, early stages of family development and formation.

As a result, Head Start is a proven component of the long-standing national commitment to break the cycle of poverty that prevents children from achieving their full potential by building strong families and communities. Locally-controlled programs prepare children for success in school and life and employ over a quarter of a million individuals across the country. Continued robust funding for Head Start is a wise, cost-effective investment in children, families, and local communities, ultimately leading to greater prosperity for future generations.

As the House moves FY24 spending bills forward, we are deeply concerned with reductions proposed in the Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill. As introduced, H.R. 5894 not only fails to make critical inflationary adjustments to Head Start or address the woefully undercompensated Head Start staff, it would slash overall Head Start funding by \$750 million.

We're equally concerned about the possibility of a constrained legislative path that would disallow the House to amend H.R. 5894. This runs counter to the regular order that the GOP has so strongly supported upon taking the majority.

Across the country, local Head Start grant recipients continue to face substantial challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff as they struggle to pay competitive wages and match the benefits provided by comparable jobs in their communities. Yet, strong outcomes for Head Start children and families depend on well-qualified staff, and compensation is a critical component to recruiting and retaining that staff.

At the same time, compensation for the early childhood workforce, including Head Start, ranks in the lowest 10 percent of professions, resulting in an unprecedented turnover of Head Start staff and threatening the stability and ability of Head Start programs to properly serve a maximum number of children. Indeed, according to the National Head Start Association's most recent workforce survey to be published this month, 15 percent of staff positions are currently vacant, and 14 percent of classrooms are currently closed, largely due to a lack of staff. Despite this, demand for Head Start remains incredibly strong. The survey indicated over 90% of programs maintain a significant waitlist, with those lists totaling between 130,000 and 270,000 children nationwide.

With all that in mind, the proposed \$750 million (6.25%) cut to Head Start, along with the impact of inflation (currently 3.7%), would have a devastating impact – closing additional classrooms and cutting services to roughly 80,000 children and their families, including nearly 2,000 in Louisiana and over 450 in your congressional district alone. Here are just two examples of how your constituents in Louisiana's Fourth Congressional District would be affected:

- Caddo Parish Commission Head Start and Early Head Start in Shreveport serves 1,564 Head Start students and 80 Early Head Start students in 11 centers across Shreveport, Caddo Parish, Keithville, and Oil City. Currently, this program is funded to operate 85 Head Start classrooms and 18 Early Head Start classrooms with a total of 324 staff. A funding cut of this magnitude would drastically impact both services and staffing, potentially eliminating services for 160 children and their families and over 30 staff positions.
- Pine Belt Multi-Purpose Community Action Agency in Jonesboro serves over 125 children and their families. They are already faced with significant transportation issues, a shortage of funds to enroll teachers and teacher assistants in education and training programs to receive necessary certifications, and staff salaries significantly below those in surrounding parishes. A cut of this level would result in a substantial reduction in staff, including teachers, teaching assistants, bus drivers, and possibly more, necessitating the closure of classrooms, potentially affecting as many as 15 children and families who would lose access to essential services.

Cuts of this nature would forever reshape Head Start and ultimately cripple the ability of many children to start school on par with their peers from less disadvantaged backgrounds. Parents would be forced to leave jobs or discontinue their own schooling due to a lack of affordable, quality care for their children.

For decades, Congress has united in a nonpartisan manner around Head Start to provide high-quality early learning and support to our nation's underserved children and their families. As you consider both the substance and the process of moving FY24 legislation to the president's desk, we urge you to fundamentally shift the conversation from cutting critical programs to impactful investing in the future. We also urge you to ensure the FY24 Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill receives due process and that amendments are permitted to address these concerns.

Again, congratulations on your recent election as Speaker of the House. We welcome any opportunity to work with you and your team to disrupt generational poverty in America. As you lead the House, we, the Head Start community, hope you will oppose any cuts that would harm the vulnerable children and families in your district and across the country served by Head Start.

Sincerely,

National Head Start Association  
National Indian Head Start Directors Association  
National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association

New England Head Start Association  
Region II Head Start Association  
Region III Head Start Association  
Region IV Head Start Association  
Region V Head Start Association

Region VI Head Start Association  
Region VII Head Start Association  
Region VIII Head Start Association  
Region IX Head Start Association  
Region X Head Start Association

Alabama Head Start Association  
Alaska Head Start Association  
Arizona Head Start Association  
Arkansas Head Start Association  
Head Start California  
Colorado Head Start Association  
Connecticut Head Start Association  
Delaware Head Start Association

D.C. Head Start Association  
Florida Head Start Association  
Georgia Head Start Association  
Hawaii Head Start Association  
Idaho Head Start Association  
Illinois Head Start Association  
Indiana Head Start Association  
Iowa Head Start Association

Kansas Head Start Association  
Kentucky Head Start Association  
Louisiana Head Start Association  
Maine Head Start Association  
Maryland Head Start Association  
Massachusetts Head Start Association  
Michigan Head Start Association  
Minnesota Head Start Association  
Mississippi Head Start Association  
Missouri Head Start Association  
Montana Head Start Association  
Nebraska Head Start Association  
Nevada Head Start Association  
New Hampshire Head Start Association  
New Jersey Head Start Association  
New Mexico Head Start Association  
New York Head Start Association  
North Carolina Head Start Association

North Dakota Head Start Association  
Ohio Head Start Association  
Oklahoma Head Start Association  
Oregon Head Start Association  
Pennsylvania Head Start Association  
Puerto Rico Head Start Association  
Rhode Island Head Start Association  
South Carolina Head Start Association  
South Dakota Head Start Association  
Tennessee Head Start Association  
Texas Head Start Association  
Utah Head Start Association  
Vermont Head Start Association  
Virginia Head Start Association  
Washington Head Start Association  
West Virginia Head Start Association  
Wisconsin Head Start Association  
Wyoming Head Start Association