



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

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## **An Open Letter about the Future of Head Start**

**May 18, 2024**

Dear President Biden,

This week marks the 59th anniversary of the signing of the Head Start Act. This continuing national commitment to opportunity for our country's youngest children, regardless of their circumstances at birth, has been an important positive influence on more than 39 million children – including our own. It gives them a foundation for a lifetime of learning and growth in school and the wider world.

Despite the long and proven track record of success, we are concerned about the future. We, the undersigned Head Start and Early Head Start parents and caregivers, ask our national leaders to hear our voice and continue the commitment by reconsidering the impact of the proposed new Head Start rule, prioritizing:

- Making sure any new requirements are fully paid for, and do not result in reducing the number of children and families served;
- Keeping our children safe and healthy utilizing proven practices, not arbitrary federal rules; and
- Recognizing the unique cultures, traditions, and preferences of our communities and continuing to provide Head Start programs the local autonomy to meet individual community needs.

Head Start has had a deep and lasting impact on our own lives and the lives of our children. It not only changes lives, through high quality education in safe, healthy, and fun spaces where our children can grow, learn, and develop into the amazing people we know they will be, but it also saves lives by helping families escape domestic violence, move out of being unhoused, achieve educational and career goals, and get back on our feet after unplanned life events. Furthermore, Head Start provides us with support for how to be the best parents/caregivers we can be and empowers us to be active participants in our children's education and well-being.

Our Head Start staff (teachers, family service workers, bus drivers, program directors, health service workers, etc.) are real life heroes and they deserve to be compensated adequately and fairly for their work. And while we believe the proposed rule is well intentioned, we respectfully do not agree with the Administration trying to issue pay requirements without providing the additional money needed by our programs to be able to make these critical changes. New salary rules should only be in effect alongside the funds to pay for them. If Head Start is forced to reduce the number of children served in order to cover these extra costs, even fewer families like us will have access to the opportunities provided by Head Start. That is unacceptable.

The new rule also equates better child health and safety with additional reporting requirements. We support strong accountability – our children’s well-being is and should always be the number one priority. However, we are concerned that the level of additional regulations will be a distraction from what is really going on in a classroom or center, and that it disregards common sense individual circumstances while unnecessarily elevating certain mistakes. We trust the staff in our children’s programs, and our parent policy councils who make key decisions. We urge the Administration to empower local leaders while focusing on oversight practices that are proven to work.

Head Start’s unwavering philosophy states that where you come from shouldn’t stand in the way of where you’re going. We know that our children’s futures shine brighter thanks to the opportunities they have through Head Start.

On this 59th anniversary of the creation of Head Start, we urge Washington leaders to hear our collective voice and ensure that the new Head Start rule is fully funded, based on proven practices rather than arbitrary federal rules, and maintains the local autonomy on which Head Start was founded, first achieved success, and continues to remain grounded.

Head Start and Early Head Start has been our nation’s commitment to young children, families, and the future of our great nation for more than half a century. We urge you to do everything in your power to ensure that commitment will remain intact for decades and centuries to come.

Sincerely,

The parents and caregivers in Head Start and Early Head Start

**[\[SIGNING PORTAL\]](#)**