



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

December 12, 2025

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

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

The Honorable Susan Collins
U.S. Senate
S-128 The Capitol
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
U.S. Senate
S-146 The Capitol
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

During the recent government shutdown, Head Start parents, program staff, volunteers, and community leaders rallied around Head Start's whole-family, early childhood education services to make sure thousands of children avoided learning disruptions, received healthy meals, and continued to benefit from Head Start's comprehensive support. Directors cobbled together emergency funds, community partners stepped in with donations, and staff came to work not knowing when they'd next be paid.

The efforts of our community allowed a mother of two in Stamford, Connecticut, to keep working and earn her Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, a mother in Warren County, Missouri, to remain employed as a medical secretary while pursuing her certificate in sonography, and a father in New Orleans, Louisiana, to remain gainfully employed in the insurance industry, all while their children were in safe, dependable Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms. Indeed, if not for the extraordinary dedication and creativity of Head Start staff and community leaders across the country, tens of thousands of children and their families would have lost access to their classrooms, their teachers, and the stability that Head Start provides. I've never been prouder.

But while there was a collective sigh of relief over at least a temporary funding solution and the end of the shutdown, it came at great cost to the Head Start community. Head Start staff, already among the lowest wage-earners, went without pay and are now trying to catch up on rent and utilities payments. Programs deferred maintenance and delayed repairs to keep their doors open. In some instances, Head Start programs lost trained staff to other job opportunities – staff who will be hard to replace. The shutdown didn't just stop things; it set us back.

Going forward, and now more than ever, families need stability. Children need access to education and nutritious meals. Communities need the services provided by Head Start. Local economies need the buying

power of Head Start programs. The approximately 750,000 children and families across the country who count on Head Start providing comprehensive early learning, health, and family support services need certainty.

One critical way Congress can help is by working quickly to resolve fiscal year 2026 (FY26) funding for Head Start and providing a meaningful cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to keep programs from sliding further behind the economic curve. The National Head Start Association urges you to support and include a three percent (3%) COLA in the final FY26 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

The Head Start community went above and beyond during the shutdown and has actually been doing so for the past two years of level funding. Repeated level funding, plus increasing energy and food prices, and an unanticipated and costly government shutdown have resulted in many programs reaching a breaking point.

I urge you to act expeditiously to restore and replenish Head Start by bringing stability to not only Head Start programs, but to the wonderful kids and families – those who are economically disadvantaged, in foster care, experiencing homelessness, navigating life with disabilities, and the children of farm laborers and tribal members – as well.

Head Start stood by children and families. Now, I urge you and your colleagues to stand by Head Start.

Sincerely,



Yasmina Vinci
Executive Director, National Head Start Association

cc: House Appropriations Committee Members
Senate Appropriations Committee Members