



Coalition Toolkit: Protect Head Start

On April 11, *USA Today* reported that the Trump White House is seriously considering **eliminating funding for Head Start** in its FY26 budget proposal. While unconfirmed, this rumor is deeply concerning. It is important to take action right now and urge Congress to protect Head Start and oppose any effort to weaken or eliminate it.

It is also important to remember that a White House budget request is a guiding document or “wish list” that allows the President to showcase his administration’s priorities. According to the Constitution, only Congress has the authority to make decisions about which agencies, programs, and activities receive funding and at what levels. This is accomplished through the appropriations process.

We need to make it very clear to Congress that they must stand up for Head Start. It has strong, bipartisan support in Congress. And we have seen supportive statements from Secretary Kennedy and others at HHS for the program. But right now, we need Members to weigh in to protect Head Start **before** the White House finalizes its budget proposal.

Our message is simple: Protect our kids. Protect Head Start.

Take Action

There are five primary ways to take action. Click [HERE](#) for easy-to-use language for each of the actions below so you can quickly copy, paste, send!

- 1** **Contact your Member of Congress** and urge them to oppose any attempts to weaken or defund Head Start. [First Five Years Fund](#), [National Head Start Association Action](#), [ZERO TO THREE](#), [NAEYC](#), and [Child Care Aware of America](#) have tools that make it quick and easy to reach out. Or create your own!
- 2** **Invite your Member of Congress** to visit a Head Start program in their district while they are home for recess! Build a relationship with Members and their staff by showing them how integral your programs are to your community, your children, and their congressional district.
- 3** **Spread the word on social media.** Link to this toolkit to engage fellow advocates. Tag your Members of Congress. Use the hashtag #ProtectHeadStart.
- 4** **Rally your troops!** Send an email to your partners, colleagues, and fellow advocates, encouraging them to take action. We need to make sure Congress hears us, so we need all of our voices. Sample language is [HERE](#).
- 5** **Publish a letter to the editor** in your hometown newspapers. Ask your Members of Congress, by name, to protect Head Start. We have a pre-written version [HERE](#) and can help place it - just let us know!

The Message to Congress: Stand up for Head Start. Reject any attempts to weaken or eliminate this important program.

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded programs that support families with young children who are living in poverty, in foster care, or experiencing homelessness.

Head Start provides children from eligible families with high-quality early learning as well as medical, dental, vision, behavioral, health, and nutrition services.

Without Head Start, 750,000 of our nation's most vulnerable children will lose access to high-quality early learning as well as meals, health and vision screenings, dental services, and the skills they need to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

In many areas, especially rural communities, Head Start is a family's only access to child care. Without it, hundreds of thousands of parents and caregivers won't be able to go to work.

Data At A Glance

\$26,650 or less: Income level at which a family of three qualifies for Head Start

750,000: Number of children served by Head Start in 2024

17,000: Number of Head Start/Early Head Start centers operating nationwide, serving families in every Congressional district

It's time to build on existing support. Here are some examples:

- In a 2023 poll from Republican pollster Public Opinion Strategies, **80% of voters** say they supported providing more funding to Head Start to support families with the greatest needs, including **71% of Republicans** and **89% of all parents**.
- "I had a very inspiring tour [of a Head Start program]. I saw a devoted staff and a lot of happy children. They are getting the kind of education and socialization they need, and they are also getting a couple of meals a day." – **Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr.**
- "Head Start programs are instrumental in providing educational opportunities that help children cultivate new skills and prepare them for a lifetime of success." – **Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME)**
- "I have been a strong supporter of Head Start throughout my time in Congress because I believe in the potential of every West Virginia child. By supporting programs that give our children the tools they need to be successful in the classroom and beyond, we can help ensure their future is filled with opportunity." – **Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV)**
- "Education is one of the most important building blocks for success, and quality learning and development in the earliest years makes a world of difference in the lives of our children. I am grateful for the tools Head Start provides, ensuring all children can have a solid foundation for learning and thriving in school." – **Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK)**
- "Access to a good education is one of the most important tools we can give our children. From health services to educational programs—Head Start provides critical assistance to many families across South and West Texas. Before being elected to Congress, I served on the San Antonio Head Start Policy Council to ensure our children have the resources they need to put their best foot forward in life." – **Rep. Tony Gonzales (R-TX)**
- Last year, **33 House Republicans** signed a letter to Appropriators in support of Head Start and calling for it to be funded "at the highest level the Subcommittee deems possible."