



FFYF Capsule Collection: Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations

What Are Appropriations?

- “Appropriations” is the Congressional process which allocates funding for federal programs (such as the ones that provide the backbone of child care and early learning.) In practice, it kicks off each February, when the White House submits a budget request to Congress to outline the president’s spending priorities. From there, Congressional appropriators in the House and Senate decide program-by-program funding levels. (In an ideal world, Congress produces a budget resolution by October 1. In practice, the process is not usually this clear-cut.)
- The budget produces 12 separate appropriations bills, each determined by a specific subcommittee which oversees budgeting for individual agencies. Child care and early learning bills are primarily funded through the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education and Related Agencies bill (often called “Labor-H”).
- Senate Appropriations is headed by Committee Chair Sen. Susan Collins (R, ME) and Ranking Member Sen. Patty Murray (D, WA), with its Labor-H Subcommittee headed by Subcommittee Chair Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R, WV) and Ranking Member Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D., WA). See more at the official Senate Appropriations Committee.
- House Appropriations is headed by Committee Chair Rep. Tom Cole (R., OK) and Ranking Member Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D., CT), with its Labor-H Subcommittee headed by Subcommittee Chair Rep. Robert Aderholt (R., AL) and Subcommittee Ranking Member Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D., CT). See more at the official House Appropriations Committee.

In A Nutshell

Even with growing support from states, businesses and philanthropy, federal funding makes up the majority of investment in child care and early learning in the United States.

- **The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)** is the largest source of federal funding for child care. Congress sets the funding levels, then states have flexibility in how they use these funds to support early learning and care systems to best meet the needs of children, parents, and child care providers in their communities.
- **Early Head Start/Head Start** are also funded through appropriations and deliver comprehensive early learning, health, nutrition, and family support services for young kids, their families, and pregnant women.
- Programs like **Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5)** help states collect data and build an infrastructure that ensures quality, safety, and efficiency between different child care options.

However, while federal investments for early learning and care have garnered strong bipartisan support for years, current federal investments only reach a fraction of income-eligible families.

FINAL LOOK

The FY26 Appropriations process was complicated by a series of continuing resolutions, rumors of a Head Start elimination, Congressional gridlock, and a 43-day government shutdown. In the end, however, Congress reached agreement, the first time they moved individual bills instead of a large omnibus in recent history.

Final passage, which included funding increases for CCDBG and Early Head Start-Head Start took place in late **January 2026**.

FY2026 Final Results

- The final FY2026 package included:
- **\$85M increase** for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program, for a total of \$8.831 billion
- **\$85M increase** for Early Head Start-Head Start, for a total of \$12.357 billion
- **Level funding** for Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5) for a total of \$315 million.

Final Vote

- House: 217-214
- Senate: 71-29
- The bill was signed into law by President Trump on February 3, 2026.

Deeper Dive: Resources and Information

From topline to in-depth, these resources can be used in meetings with staffers, with reporters, or simply to get up to speed on the importance of federal funding to child care and early learning.

- The **FY26 Appropriations State of Play** page had time-sensitive updates on the appropriations process.
- The **Funding for Key Early Learning Programs** chart provided our deepest dive into FY2026 funding specifics, including FY24 funding levels, White House asks, the child care community's ask, and the House and Senate appropriators asks.
- This **FY26 Early Learning and Child Care Appropriations Letters** detailed funding asks, including leading signers and funding amounts.
- Our **First Five Things about the Importance of Federal Funding** was our most topline look at how federal funding allocated by Congress fuels early learning and child care programs.
- The **ABCs of Federal Early Learning and Child Care Funding Streams** gave a detailed overview into the funding that supports the federal early learning and care programs.
- This one-pager, **Federal Investments are the Foundation for State and Local Early Care and Education Programs**, provided a detailed look at how federal funding acts as the primary source of funding for public early learning and care programs.
- **Statement from FFYF Executive Director Sarah Rittling** on the September funding markup from Congress.

Community Support

First Five Years Fund (FFYF) and a coalition of 147 national organizations **signed a joint letter to Congressional appropriators** calling for increased funding for federal early learning and care programs in FY2025, including the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start and Early Head Start, IDEA, and PDG B-5.

Voter Support

Voters believe federal funding for child care and early learning programs should be increased.

- A **February 2025 poll** shows child care expenses continue to be a major financial burden on working families.
- In the same poll, voters say improving access to affordable child care will both help lower costs for working families (85%) and improve the overall economy (71%).
- A majority (55%) of Republican voters say increasing funding for and access to quality child care is as important for families as securing the border and stopping the increase of crime.
- In a **January 2026 poll**: 82% say federal funding for child care programs will help lower costs for working families, and 70% say it will improve the economy.

[FY26 Early Learning and Child Care Appropriations Letters](#)

[Links to all FY26 Dear Colleague letters.](#)

FY26 Bipartisan Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Letter

- Led by Representatives Joaquin Castro (D-TX) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA)
- 93 signatures
- Ask: Fund PDG B-5 at a level of at least \$500 million

FY26 Democrat Led CCDBG Letter

- Led by Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)
- 154 signatures
- Ask: Provide at least \$12.4 billion for CCDBG.

FY26 Republican Led CCDBG Letter

- Led by Representative Burgess Owens (R-UT)
- 35 signatures
- Ask: Provide robust funding for CCDBG.

FY26 Democrat Led Head Start and Early Head Start Letter

- Led by Representative Jahana Hayes (D-CT)
- 188 signatures
- Ask: Provide \$14.91 billion for Head Start in FY2026.

FY26 Republican Led Head Start Letter

- Led by Representative Pete Stauber (R-MN)
- 35 signatures
- Ask: Continue funding Head Start at the strongest level the Subcommittee deems possible.

Senate Letters

- Senate Democratic Dear Colleague Letter Supporting Funding for Early Care and Education — Led by Sen. Tina Smith (D-MN), 41 signatures, calling to provide the highest feasible funding.
- Senate Dear Colleague Letter Supporting Funding for CCAMPIS in FY2026 — Led by Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL).

About First Five Years Fund

The first five years last forever. At First Five Years Fund, we work to protect, prioritize, and build bipartisan support for quality child care and early learning programs at the federal level. Reliable, affordable, and high-quality early learning and child care can be transformative, not only enhancing a child's prospects for a brighter future but also bolstering working parents and fostering economic stability nationwide. Join us at www.ffyf.org.

