

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

DATE, 2026

The Honorable Robert Aderholt  
Chair  
Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
1036 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you consider Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations, we urge you to provide robust funding for Head Start at the highest level the Subcommittee deems possible. Head Start provides critical support for our nation's most vulnerable children and families, working to lift them out of poverty and give them the opportunity to be independent, free from reliance on government programs.

Head Start offers services to children from at-risk backgrounds – those living in poverty, in foster care, or experiencing homelessness – as well as family, employment, and educational support, benefitting children, families, communities, and our nation in a multitude of ways:

- **Head Start helps parents work, not rely on welfare**, because providing safe, reliable early education for children gives their parents the opportunity to work, train, or serve in the military, reducing reliance on public assistance and strengthening family economic independence.
- **Head Start strengthens families** because each program is locally run by community nonprofits, schools, and faith-based organizations – not Washington bureaucrats – who, working closely with parents, decide how programs operate, based on local needs and parent preferences.
- **Head Start rewards responsibility, not entitlement**, because families must meet eligibility rules and actively participate in their child's education, and the program emphasizes parent preference and involvement, program accountability, and measurable outcomes, not handouts.
- **Head Start prepares American kids to compete and win** because improving school readiness ensures children go to kindergarten with strong literacy skills – ready to read and write, better able to communicate with others, and with a strong sense of curiosity and love of learning, which ultimately builds a stronger future workforce.
- **Head Start supports rural communities, small towns, and working-class families** because, by disproportionately serving families in those areas that often lack other early education and childcare options, they are empowered to thrive and contribute to their communities.

Head Start programs can be found in every congressional district and, in some communities, are the only early learning options available. Knowing that each community has different strengths, resources, and challenges, and reflecting the federal-to-local funding of Head Start, each program is locally designed to reflect individual community needs and priorities, determined primarily by parents.

Head Start serves as a lifeline to connect families to the resources they need while also supporting quality child development. In 2025, Head Start served nearly 700,000 children and their families nationwide. During the year, Head Start conducted over 3.5 million visits to families in their homes, helped over 673,000 children stay up to date on early and periodic diagnostic treatments, ensured that more than 566,000 children received preventative dental care, and involved more than 201,000 fathers in their children's educational experiences. Children who attend Head Start are more likely to have healthy eating patterns, complete high school, enroll in and graduate from college, and be gainfully employed. And they are less likely to smoke or experience poor health, be arrested or incarcerated, continue to live in poverty, or need public assistance as adults. We collectively commend the successful outcomes of this valuable program.

While difficult funding decisions lie ahead, members on both sides of the political aisle have long agreed that investing in Head Start to provide high-quality early learning and support for our nation's underserved children and their families is a fiscally responsible course of action. Indeed, economic research has shown that high-quality early childhood programs, like Head Start, generate an annual return on investment of more than 13%. And Head Start parents and caregivers, having benefited from goal setting, parenting training, and experiencing real engagement, are more likely to join the workforce or stay employed, setting them and their families on a path of economic self-reliance.

Head Start is not a big-government experiment. Rather, it's a pro-work, pro-family, locally driven program that helps American children succeed and parents stay employed and thrive. And, unlike some federal programs, Head Start's oversight and annual audits hold it accountable for every dollar it receives. Supporting Head Start means investing early so the government doesn't have to step in later, putting children and their families on the path to success in school, in work, and in life, ultimately leading to greater prosperity for future generations of Americans.

As you evaluate FY27 funding requests, we strongly and respectfully urge the Subcommittee to prioritize Head Start. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

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Pete Stauber  
Member of Congress

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Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you consider Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations, we respectfully request \$14.27 billion for Head Start.<sup>1</sup> Head Start is our nation's flagship early learning program, supporting healthy child development and serving as a lifeline for the most vulnerable children and families in our country. This investment will provide a cost-of-living adjustment (our primary request for FY27), allow programs to address critical local priorities, increase access to fresh and nutritious food, and expand recruitment and development of staff for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) programs. In addition, investments would address the demonstrated need for expansion of Early Head Start and facility improvements through separate competitive grant programs administered by the Office of Head Start (OHS).

Head Start served nearly 700,000 children and their families across every congressional district in FY26. In that time, Head Start programs conducted over 3.5 million home visits, helped over 673,000 children stay up-to-date on diagnostic treatments, ensured that over 566,000 children received preventative dental care, and involved more than 201,000 fathers in their children's education.

Investing in Head Start is fiscally responsible. Economic research has shown that high-quality early childhood programs, like Head Start, generate an annual return on investment of more than 13%.<sup>2</sup> Children who attend Head Start are more likely to have healthy eating patterns, complete high school, enroll in and graduate from college, and be gainfully employed. They are also less likely to experience poor health, be arrested or incarcerated, continue to live in poverty, or need public assistance as adults.

Our funding request would help programs maintain the level of quality needed to benefit Head Start children, families, staff, and the communities they serve, through the following:

- A cost-of living adjustment (COLA) of 4.97% (\$615 million) for Head Start in FY27. While inflation since the beginning of FY24 has reached 5.57% according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Calculator,<sup>3</sup> Head Start has received a COLA of just 0.6%. Providing a COLA for Head Start is our top priority, as programs are struggling with hiring and retaining quality staff, impacting both the quality of service and continuity of care.
- \$537 million in Quality Improvement Funds (QIF) for FY27 to help local Head Start programs address barriers to full enrollment, maximize capacity, and deliver lasting impact for the children

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<sup>1</sup> Head Start includes all of the following: Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership programs.

<sup>2</sup> "Quantifying The Life-Cycle Benefits Of A Prototypical Early Childhood Program," National Bureau of Economic Research, [Working Paper 23479](#), June 2017.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm)

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and families in each community they serve. QIF allows Head Start programs to address critical local needs, identified in partnership with OHS.

- \$206 million in FY27 funding for programs to access fresh and nutritious food beyond Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) funding. For many children, Head Start meals are often the only real meals they receive. However, CACFP funds are often insufficient and programs must look for additional funding to make sure participating children can access nutritious and healthy food.
- \$13 million in FY27 to expand the Tribal Colleges and Universities–Head Start Partnership Program and increase the percentage of teachers in AI/AN communities receiving bachelor’s degrees. The Tribal Colleges and Universities–Head Start Partnership Program is critical to expanding the number of staff culturally and linguistically suited to address the growing need for Head Start services in AI/AN communities.
- \$200 million in FY27 funding for a competitive grant program to be administered by OHS to expand Early Head Start. Many fully staffed, fully enrolled Early Head Start programs have lengthy waitlists and are looking to expand. Fewer than 15% of programs that applied for expansion funds in 2024 received funding, demonstrating a significant need to expand the program.
- \$339 million in FY27 funding for a competitive grant program to be administered by OHS to repair, renovate, rebuild, or replace Head Start facilities. Many aging Head Start facilities require additional federal investment for high-quality repairs and improvements. A FY15 OHS report projected that need at over \$3.8 billion, and inflation has greatly increased that number.

For decades, Congress has united around Head Start to provide high-quality early learning and support for underserved children and their families throughout our country. FY27 represents an opportunity to reinvigorate this vital federal-to-local partnership. Congress must continue to invest in and allow Head Start to continue putting children and families on the path to success in school, in work, and in life.

As you evaluate FY27 funding requests, we strongly and respectfully urge the Subcommittee to prioritize \$14.27 billion for Head Start. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

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