

Head Start for America's Children Act

In America today, just a fraction of young children have access to high quality early learning opportunities. Research tells us that the first five years of life are among the most critical for social, emotional, and intellectual development, yet quality early learning opportunities are too often reserved for families who can afford to pay thousands of dollars for it.

For the past 60 years, Head Start programs have changed the lives of more than 40 million children and families across this country. Head Start is a critical source of child care for working families, particularly in rural and Tribal communities where Head Start programs are often the only option for high-quality child care. And for children with disabilities Head Start plays a critical role in providing early childhood education and early intervention services. Today, nearly 800,000 young children receive early education and comprehensive services like health care, dental care, and healthy meals through Head Start, while their families access referrals to job training, adult education, nutrition services, and housing support. Head Start children have better health, are more prepared for kindergarten, and have a greater likelihood of graduating high school and going to college.

Despite its success, the Trump Administration has called for the elimination of Head Start, and taken actions to withhold and delay funding, fire Head Start staff, and gut supports for programs to provide high-quality services and monitoring. That is unacceptable. As a nation, we have a moral responsibility to ensure our children have a bright future, starting with a high-quality, early childhood education.

Rather than attacking Head Start programs and handing out tax breaks to the top 1%, we should be expanding Head Start by making sure that every child from a working class family has the early education he or she needs by demanding that the wealthiest people in America pay their fair share of taxes. That is exactly what the *Head Start for America's Children Act* would do:

Fully fund Head Start to serve all eligible families who want to participate. Currently, 9.5 million children are eligible for Head Start, but without adequate funding, only 9 percent of eligible children are being served.

- The bill would provide nearly \$145 billion to extend eligibility to a total of 11 million young children from working class families and provide adequate funding to serve them.
- The bill would simplify the process for families to enroll, particularly for children with disabilities, families who qualify for public assistance programs, children in kinship and protective services.
- The bill would provide \$95 million to pilot community eligibility in communities with high rates of poverty.

Align Head Start hours with families' working day and year schedules. Approximately 56 percent of Head Start programs operate for 32 hours a week for 8 months (about 7am to 3pm), which is similar to the school year.

- The bill would provide nearly \$5.3 billion for Head Start programs to operate full-working-day and full calendar year hours, including throughout the summer and for extended hours so families do not have to worry about finding additional child care.

Ensure Head Start educators are fairly compensated at least \$60,000 a year: Due to low pay, Head Start programs have open seats for children, but no staff to serve them. Between 2010 and 2023, the inflation-adjusted annual salary for Head Start educators has increased by less than 1 percent, from \$41,389 to \$41,691.

- The bill ensures all Head Start educators earn at least \$60,000 a year and that all Head Start staff have competitive benefits and salary scales.
- The bill creates a \$37.5 million Rebuilding Head Start Workforce Grants to address immediate workforce needs, particularly for under-enrolled programs. These temporary grants would provide \$3,000 bonuses for 125,000 educators to help attract, recruit, and retain Head Start staff.

Improve mental health supports for Head Start staff, families, and children: Children and families experiencing poverty are more likely to encounter stressors linked to mental health challenges and experience barriers to accessing appropriate services.

- This bill provides \$80 million to ensure all Head Start programs provide adequate screenings for participating children, mental health consultations, and staff wellness breaks.

Allow Early Head Start and Head Start programs to partner with child care providers and co-locate on college campuses. Over 5 million students, 1 in 5 undergraduates and 1 in 3 graduate students, are student parents. Access to child care is critical for student parents to persist and graduate from college, but less than a third of colleges offer on-campus child care.

- This bill would set aside \$1.6 billion to create grants for child care providers to partner with Early Head Start and Head Start programs.
- This bill invests \$500 million to facilitate co-location of Early Head Start and Head Start programs on college campuses to expand access to child care for student parents.

Expand Head Start partnerships between Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and other Minority Serving Institutions: Head Start programs are experiencing a severe shortage with turnover at the highest point in two decades. Currently, there are a handful of higher education institutions that partner with local Head Start programs to educate and train future early educators.

- This bill would increase investments from \$8 million to \$40 million to develop strong pipelines of diverse, early educators for local Head Start programs.

Support transportation and facilities upgrades for Head Start programs. Head Start families disproportionately lack access to personal or public means of transportation, making it difficult to access Head Start services. Many Head Start programs do not have the funding necessary to address dire facilities needs, like updating HVAC systems, fixing leaky roofs, and testing water.

- This bill would provide \$91.5 million to provide age-appropriate transportation for eligible children, including transportation for children experiencing homelessness, to facilitate their participation in the program.
- This bill would provide \$5 billion for Head Start grantees to make critical facilities updates.