

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 6, 2026

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We write to express our strong opposition to the proposed rule, “Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs.” As Members of Congress representing communities that rely on Head Start, we are concerned about the significant impact these proposed changes would have on children, families, and the local organizations that provide these services.

We believe Head Start is an essential resource for families in our communities, particularly for families who rely on these programs for early education, developmental services, and support during times of economic or housing instability. We recently heard directly from Head Start providers about how the proposed rule would affect their ability to serve children and families. E Center, which provides services across Butte, Glenn, Lake, Sutter, Colusa, Tehama, Yolo, and Yuba Counties, and North Coast Opportunities, which serves families throughout Lake and Mendocino Counties, as well as surrounding communities in Sonoma, Napa, Solano, Humboldt, and Del Norte Counties, both raised serious concerns about the proposed changes and the consequences they could have for the children and families they serve. We have also heard from Head Start workers and families who are concerned about the effect these changes would have on classroom staffing, services for children with disabilities, safety concerns, and programs’ ability to meet the needs of their communities. These concerns are especially significant in rural communities, where Head Start is often a critical source of early childhood education and family support.

We are concerned that the proposed changes would weaken the comprehensive nature of Head Start. Head Start is not simply an early education program. For many families, it is a critical connection to health, developmental, mental health, disability, nutrition, and family support services. In some communities, Head Start may be one of the only organizations regularly connected to a family and able to identify when a child or parent needs additional assistance.

We have heard from providers that eliminating federal standards for staff-to-child ratios and group sizes could result in larger classrooms and fewer staff available to support each child. This is especially concerning for programs serving very young children, children with challenging behaviors, and children with developmental delays or other additional needs. Providers have told us that maintaining appropriate staffing levels is essential to creating safe, supportive classrooms and providing children with the individualized attention they need to learn and develop.

We are also concerned about the proposed reduction in health and developmental services. Providers in our communities have emphasized that Head Start staff are often among the first professionals to identify developmental, hearing, vision, dental, or mental health concerns in young children. Removing requirements for screenings and follow-up services could mean that children who need additional support are identified later and miss valuable opportunities for early intervention.

This concern is particularly significant for children with disabilities. E Center has told us that it serves a high percentage of children with diagnosed disabilities and regularly works with children who are awaiting evaluations for possible disabilities. Early identification and intervention can make a significant difference in a child's development and long-term educational outcomes. We should be strengthening these services, not making it more difficult for Head Start programs to provide them while children and families navigate lengthy evaluation processes.

North Coast Opportunities told us that many of the families they serve in Lake County are still dealing with the long-term consequences of devastating wildfires that have destroyed housing and important personal records. Separately, we were told that Butte County, which has also been devastated by wildfires, has faced similar devastation, with families continuing to navigate displacement, housing instability, and the loss of important personal records. For families experiencing homelessness, displacement, domestic violence, or other crises, these circumstances can make it difficult to access the documentation required to enroll their children in specialized services. These are precisely the communities where families need reliable access to Head Start, and we should not be cutting or limiting services when families are still working to recover from these disasters.

We are also concerned about the proposed reduction in the administrative spending cap from 15 percent to 5 percent. For large, geographically dispersed organizations like E Center, which provides services across eight counties, administrative capacity is necessary to support the staff and programs operating in communities throughout the region. We have heard directly that this change could force providers to reduce or potentially eliminate services in communities where families depend on them.

The concerns we are raising are not theoretical. They come directly from organizations working every day with children and families in our communities. These providers understand the challenges facing Head Start and have continued to adapt to rising costs, workforce shortages,

housing instability, and increasingly complex family needs. They are telling us that the proposed rule would make it more difficult to provide the comprehensive services that families rely on.

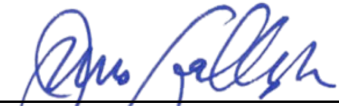
We recognize the importance of ensuring federal programs are administered effectively and that providers have the flexibility to respond to the needs of their communities. However, reducing federal standards should not come at the expense of the quality, accessibility, and comprehensive nature of Head Start services. We urge HHS to withdraw or modify the proposed rule and work with Head Start providers, families, educators, and communities to identify changes that strengthen the program rather than weaken the services children depend upon.

Thank you for considering our concerns and the experiences of the communities we represent. We respectfully request that HHS withdraw or modify this proposed rule and protect the standards and services that have made Head Start an essential resource for children and families across our country.

Sincerely,



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



James Gallagher
Member of Congress