

JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

April 30, 2025

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Speaker Johnson, Leader Jeffries, Leader Thune, Leader Schumer, and Members of North Carolina's congressional delegation:

As Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and State Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, we are deeply concerned about reported proposals from Washington to eliminate funding for Head Start. Head Start and Early Head Start are comprehensive programs that provide more than 19,500 North Carolina children birth to five years with high-quality child care and early education, health screenings, and nutritious food—preparing them for school and beyond.

Head Start serves some of the most vulnerable families in our state, including families whose incomes fall below the federal poverty level, who receive public assistance, and who are experiencing homelessness, as well as children in foster care. In the past year alone, more than 11,000 Head Start families were single-parent households, more than 1,200 families served were homeless, and more than 500 children were in foster care at some point during the year.

Head Start brings more than \$290 million in federal funds directly to local economies in North Carolina, supporting more than 5,600 jobs across local agencies, private nonprofit child care centers, and school systems. The program also contributes to North Carolina's economy by enabling low-wage working families to participate fully in the workforce. Without Head Start, many families would face the impossible choice of caring for their children or earning a living—disrupting not only their careers but also businesses and the broader economy.

Head Start is a critical part of North Carolina's early childhood education system, which is already in crisis. Our state is classified as a "child care desert," with an average of five families competing for every available licensed child care slot for infant and toddler care. For those who can find care, the cost is staggering—the average annual cost of infant care (\$11,720) exceeds the average tuition at a four-year public college (\$7,453). Eliminating Head Start would deepen this crisis, jeopardizing access to essential early education and care for thousands of families.

If federal support for Head Start ends, as many as 500 child care programs in North Carolina could close. Rural areas would be particularly hard-hit, where Head Start is often one of the only high-quality child care options for low-income families. In 22 rural counties, Head Start accounts for 20 percent or more of all licensed child care slots. Families in these areas would struggle to find or afford alternative child care at private pay rates. North Carolina's subsidized child care program is already stretched thin, with more than 9,000 children on the waitlist and only about 15 percent of eligible children currently being served. Adding 19,500 displaced Head Start children would likely triple the waitlist to more than 28,000 children.

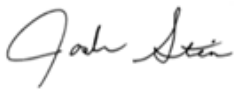
Ending Head Start would also severely hinder western North Carolina's recovery from Hurricane Helene. Of the 22 rural counties where Head Start comprises more than 20 percent of child care capacity, eight were significantly impacted by Helene. In Polk County in western North Carolina, for example, Head Start makes up 58 percent of available child care. Since the storm struck in September 2024, these programs have been a crucial source of stability for families even when child care programs were washed away in some areas. Eliminating Head Start would be a major setback for western North Carolina's economic recovery and child and family well-being.

Finally, eliminating Head Start would harm children's long-term outcomes. Research consistently shows that children who attend Head Start are more likely to graduate high school and enroll in and complete college and are less likely to be arrested, enter foster care, or experience poor health outcomes. Without Head Start, our most vulnerable children will suffer—with likely ripple effects on our education, child welfare, health, and criminal justice systems.

We respectfully urge you to consider the devastating consequences of eliminating Head Start and the severe impact it would have on North Carolina's children, families, child care system, and economy—especially in rural areas. We ask that you oppose any cuts to or elimination of the Head Start program and work to strengthen this critical investment in our future.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent issue. We look forward to partnering with you to ensure that all North Carolina children and families have access to the quality early education and care they deserve.

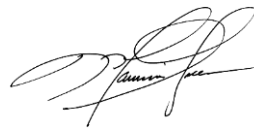
Sincerely,



Josh Stein
Governor



Rachel Hunt
Lieutenant Governor



Maurice "Mo" Green
Superintendent of Public Instruction