

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 9, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Capito and Ranking Member Baldwin:

As you consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, we respectfully request that you include report language to require the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to conduct an analysis on the scope and benefits of Head Start programs in rural communities. This report language would allow Head Start to build on its long-demonstrated success to unlock greater opportunities for children across the nation and support efforts to improve access to child care in rural communities.

Head Start is a federal program dedicated to improving the education, health, and nutritional well-being of the nation's most vulnerable children. First established in 1965 to combat the cycle of poverty,¹ the program has expanded over the past six decades to provide early childhood education and wraparound services for more than 40 million children (from birth to age five) and families.² For example, in FY 2025, Head Start facilitated 3,522,592 home visits, helped 566,954 children stay up to date on early and periodic health screenings, and provided preventative dental care to over 673,861 children.³ This nationwide program has been found to improve health outcomes, increase high school graduation rates, and reduce the likelihood of adult poverty.⁴

Head Start plays a critical role in providing child care and early learning services in rural communities. In 2025, nearly 46 percent of all Head Start slots were in rural congressional districts, compared with 32 percent in suburban districts and 22 percent in urban districts.⁵ In addition to providing early childhood education services, Head Start delivers nutritious meals and regular health screenings to children in rural communities that otherwise lack access to affordable health care and nutritious food.⁶

¹ *Head Start History*, HeadStart.gov (Jan. 31, 2025), <https://headstart.gov/about-us/article/head-start-history>.

² *Head Start Advantage: Investments That Work*, National Head Start Association, <https://nhsa.org/resource/head-start-advantage-investments-that-work>.

³ *2026 Head Start Profile*, National Head Start Association, https://nhsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/2026_StateFactSheet_National.pdf.

⁴ National Head Start Association, *supra* note 2.

⁵ *Head Start's Footprint: A Focus on Rural Communities, Children with Disabilities, and Vital Health Services*, Children's Equity Project (May 2025), <https://cep.asu.edu/resources/HeadStartsFootprint>.

⁶ *Id.*

Despite Head Start’s role in rural communities, rural families continue to face disproportionate challenges in accessing child care. According to the Center for American Progress, the percentage of children living in licensed child care deserts in rural and remote areas increased to 70 percent in 2025, compared to 66 percent in 2018.⁷ Rural families also continue to travel longer distances and navigate higher turnover of child care providers compared to their urban counterparts.⁸ As a result, a nationwide study on the challenges and opportunities in rural Head Start programs is necessary to improve families’ access to quality child care.

We recommend the Committee include the following report language in the FY 2027 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill to encourage the ACF to conduct an analysis on Head Start programs in rural communities:

Expanding Head Start in Rural Communities.—The Committee recognizes the importance of Head Start programs in providing comprehensive early childhood education services to families and their children, from before birth to age 5, in rural communities with limited access to early child care providers. The Committee recommends the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to submit a report to the Committee within 120 days of enactment analyzing current challenges faced by rural Head Start providers, the effectiveness of flexible Head Start program settings in rural communities, such as center-based, home-based, family-based, and locally-designed programs, in serving mixed-age groups of children from birth to age 5 in rural communities, and the role of Head Start in lowering the child care gap in rural communities. The Committee encourages the ACF to conduct the outlined analysis on Early Head Start, Head Start Preschool, Head Start Programs, American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Programs, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Programs for the report.

Thank you for your consideration of this important language that will help identify opportunities to improve Head Start programs in rural communities.

Sincerely,



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

⁷ *America’s Licensed Child Care Deserts*, Center for American Progress (Apr. 29, 2026), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/americas-licensed-child-care-deserts>.

⁸ *Id.*