



Funding for Head Start

FY2026 Appropriations Process

Each year, Congress determines funding levels for all of the federal defense and non-defense discretionary programs, including those that support the care and education of children from birth through age five. Traditionally, subcommittees within the House and Senate Appropriations Committees develop their own legislation that sets funding levels for the programs within their jurisdiction, which is then taken up by the full Appropriations Committees, and later the full legislative body, before a negotiation process between the two chambers of Congress and ultimately the president's signature.

The following is an overview of the FY2026 Appropriations requests for Head Start.

HEAD START Head Start Preschool Early Head Start Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships	Change In Funding (Final)		Budget Requests, FY2026			
	FY25 Funding Levels	FY26 Funding Levels	FY26 President's Budget	FY26 ECE Community Ask	FY26 House Labor-HHS Education Bill	FY26 Senate Labor-HHS Education Bill
Total Program Funding	\$12,272 billion	---	\$12.272 billion	\$14.91 billion	\$12.272 billion	\$12.357 billion
Funding Increase/ Decrease	CR through 9/30/25	---	\$0	+\$2.64 billion	\$0	+\$85 billion

[Learn More](#)

- ["Funding for Key Early Learning Programs"](#): A look at funding requests across all child care and early learning programs for the FY2026 appropriations process.
- [FFYF Capsule Collection](#) - Head Start: Resources and data about Head Start at the national, state, and district level.
- [Stand For Head Start](#): A comprehensive source of information about Head Start for Members, staffers, and advocates.

Senate Committee on Appropriations

Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and related agencies

Fiscal Year 2026

APPROPRIATIONS BILL REPORT LANGUAGE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Head Start

- The Committee provides \$12,356,820,000 for Head Start. HeadStart provides grants directly to local organizations to provide comprehensive early childhood education services to children and their families, from before birth to age 5.
- Designation Renewal System [DRS].—The Committee continues to encourage HHS to consider the unique challenges faced by Head Start grantees in remote and frontier areas when reviewing such grantees' compliance with health and dental screening requirements as part of the DRS.
- Facility Improvement Funding and Report.—The Committee continues to strongly encourage ACF to ensure that all Head Start grantees are aware of any funding opportunities, or funding otherwise available, for making capital improvements to their facilities. Further, the Committee continues to encourage ACF to standardize this process so all grantees have equal opportunity to apply and are aware of priorities and eligible uses of such funds. Additionally, the Committee directs the Office of Head Start to issue a report, no later than 180 days of enactment of this act on the state of Head Start facilities including any repair, renovation, rebuilding, and replacement of Head Start facilities that is necessary to provide a safer and welcoming environment for children and staff.
- Freely Associated States.—The Committee includes bill language to establish Head Start programs in the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia, as authorized in the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024 (Public Law 118–42)
- Native Hawaiian Programs.—The Committee encourages ACF to collaborate with Native Hawaiian leaders in family-based early childhood learning by sharing targeted information to Native Hawaiian communities, holding a public meeting, and directing them to resources on ACF's website on how to become a Head Start recipient when there are funding opportunities available in Hawaii, and to provide technical assistance to support providers within Native Hawaiian Head Start agencies. ACF is directed to brief the Committee on these efforts no later than 180 days after such a funding opportunity is made public.
- Regional Office Closures.—The Committee is aware of the closure of five Head Start regional offices across the country, which could impact Head Start centers previously served by those offices. The Committee requests a report within 60 days of enactment detailing the justification for the closures, the process for reassigning grantees to new regional offices and the notice provided to grantees, and an analysis of the impact of the closures on agency operations.
- Timely Notice of Awards.—The Committee recognizes the importance of the timely release of funding award notices for Head Start grantees. The Committee includes new bill language directing the Office of Head Start [OHS] to award funding for continuation awards and new award cycles that continue previous activities under existing awards no later than the day following the expiration of the period of performance. For grants in the Designated Renewal System, OHS may extend the current award in lieu of providing a new award for the purposes of finalizing negotiations with the grantee.
- Tribal Colleges and Universities-Head Start Partnership Program.—The Committee includes \$8,000,000 for the Tribal Colleges and Universities-Head Start Partnership Program.

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- Head Start and Early Head Start (EHS) programs fund competitive grants to promote school readiness of children under 5 from low-income families through preschool services.
- Early Head Start.—The Committee directs HHS to maintain the EHS allocation of funds to at least the current proportion of funding within the overall Head Start appropriations to ensure that eligible pregnant women, infants and toddlers, and families continue to benefit from EHS high-quality, comprehensive services. The Committee directs HHS to prioritize maintenance of current slots and then expand slots where possible, including through Head Start to Early Head Start (ES2EHS) slot conversion. Finally, the Committee continues to direct HHS to include in future congressional justifications the actual and estimated number of slots in each of Head Start, EHS, EHS Child Care Child Care Partnerships, and slots converted from ES2EHS.
- Head Start Facilities.—The Committee recognizes that repair, renovation, rebuilding, and replacement of Head Start and EHS facilities is necessary to provide a safe, high-quality, and developmentally appropriate environment for children and families. The Committee notes that the last comprehensive Head Start facilities report was conducted in fiscal year 2015 and the last American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Head Start facilities report was produced in 2020. The Committee believes that updated assessments are necessary to understand the current infrastructure needs. Therefore, the Committee directs ACF to produce and make public on its website new facilities reports on the Head Start and AI/AN Head Start programs. The Committee further directs the agency to include an analysis of the various funding mechanisms available within ACF that grantees can use for construction, renovation, or other capital improvement activities. The Committee encourages ACF to ensure all grantees are aware of any funding opportunities for facility improvements. Additionally, the Committee urges the agency to provide the necessary technical assistance to grantees for the purpose of navigating and completing the application process.
- Notice to Congressional Offices.—The Committee directs the agency to notify a congressional office if a current Head Start recipient in its congressional district will be required to recompetete to continue its grant. The agency is directed to notify the office when the grant forecast for the recipient's service area and funding is published.
- Tribal Colleges and Universities Head Start Partnership Program.—The Committee includes \$12,000,000 for the Tribal Colleges and Universities Head Start Partnership program, which is a \$4,000,000 increase above the fiscal year 2025 enacted program level.

For More Information

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