

Trump plans to shut down Head Start, destroying early education and childcare services

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In a sweeping attack on the social rights of the working class, the Trump administration, backed by Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., is planning to shut down Head Start, the nation's largest childcare and early education program.

The National Head Start Association and other education authorities have universally described this brutal attack on children and their futures as "catastrophic."

Since its inception in 1965, Head Start has served 40 million families in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and US territories. Mandated to involve parents and volunteers and provide community resources, the program is relied upon and beloved by millions.

Since taking office, Trump and Kennedy have been working to terminate the 60-year-old program. On March 15, the Trump-backed temporary funding bill for the federal government flatlined Head Start funding, constituting a de facto cut of 5.2 percent due to inflation. Officials said this would compel enrollment cuts of 12-15 percent nationally. The Democrats provided the necessary votes for passage of the funding bill.

On March 27, HHS terminated 10,000 employees, including hundreds from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), which oversees Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant. The Office of Child Care administers subsidies for 840,000 low-income children and has lost a third of its workforce. Entire teams within the Office of Community Services and Family Assistance were eliminated, and the number of HHS regional offices was halved.

On April 1, Kennedy ordered the closure of five regional Head Start offices—Chicago, Boston, New York, San Francisco and Seattle—as part of his "dramatic restructuring." On April 11, *USA Today* reported that the

White House's fiscal 2026 funding blueprint lists Head Start among the programs to be completely eliminated.

Head Start is the nation's most comprehensive early childcare and education program. It also provides a vast array of social supports in poor neighborhoods. It serves children up to five years of age. In 2024, it provided 804,969 children with educational and wellness services, including developmental screenings, meals, and nutritional support.

Decades of research have underscored Head Start's substantial contribution to young people and their families. Children who participate show gains in cognitive, language and vocabulary abilities, as well as social-emotional health, compared with their peers. Head Start graduates are more likely to finish high school, attend college, and report better health as adults.

The program has been shown to reduce rates of grade repetition, special education placement, and even criminal justice involvement. Additionally, children in Head Start are more likely to be immunized and achieve healthier BMI measurements by kindergarten, entirely antithetical to Kennedy's anti-vaccine, anti-health policy.

Grotesquely, the invaluable program is being destroyed under Kennedy's "Make America Healthy Again" guillotine.

The closure of the program would have a devastating effect on jobs. Head Start employed more than a quarter of a million people in 2024. Its closure would also force more than one million parents to reduce work hours or leave their jobs entirely.

Kennedy, trumpeting the administration's anti-science and anti-worker rhetoric, has justified the purge as a crusade against "bureaucratic sprawl," under conditions where childcare is criminally lacking across the US.

Far from being staffed with fat cat bureaucrats, the

program has always struggled to scrape by, primarily through the self-sacrificing dedication of its staff. Teachers receive a median hourly wage of \$20, with many living paycheck-to-paycheck and many forced to work two jobs.

Head Start teacher Andrea Muneton told news media outlet *The 74* she regularly puts in 80 hours a week. “We’re underpaid, overworked and we’re not appreciated,” she said.

Director of Head Start Khari Garvin said, “The great irony... is that for too long we’ve had individuals — committed staff — working in what is an anti-poverty program, many of whom have made either poverty-level wages or close to poverty-level wages.”

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) collects dues from thousands of Head Start workers. But AFT President Randi Weingarten has issued no statement on Trump’s plans to close the program, much less fought to unite Head Start teachers and educators nationally against the wholesale evisceration of public education under Education Secretary Linda McMahon.

Head Start was implemented under Johnson’s “War on Poverty.” This brief period of reformist program creation (food stamps, expansion of education programs) by the American ruling elite sought not to end poverty—which requires ending the capitalist economic system—but to cushion its effects. Johnson and the capitalist class sought to contain mass urban uprisings that began in 1964, the continuing civil rights struggles, and the outbreak of industrial strike activity with the promise of reform.

However, the staggering costs of the Vietnam War brought the economic difficulties that had been mounting throughout the 1960s to a head. Attacks on “Great Society” reforms began by the late 1970s, alongside the growing crisis of American capitalism and a vast diversion of resources to economic speculation and militarism.

The Socialist Equality Party program, *The Breakdown of Capitalism and the Fight for Socialism in the United States*, noted in 2010: “American capitalism proved incapable of realizing the promise of economic security and the elimination of poverty during the decades of its greatest successes. What, then, can be expected of this economic system in a period of breakdown and crisis?”

Indeed, Head Start—like public education as a whole—has never been fully funded and has always been incapable of serving all income-eligible children, under both Republican and Democratic administrations. In 2013, Democratic President Obama carried out the most

significant single-year cut in the program, slashing \$400 million, laying off 18,000 workers, and ending services for about 57,000 children.

Today, the program is so threadbare that only 30 percent of those eligible can get a spot for their preschooler. Only 9 percent of those eligible for the Early Head Start program (added in 1995 to serve infants and toddlers) can find a place.

Moreover, the qualifications to enroll are so austere that a family must be on the edge of homelessness to qualify. In 2025, a family’s gross income must be below 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines: e.g., a family of four must make less than \$32,150 per year. With average rent across the US at \$19,800 per year, living at the federal poverty level is next to impossible. Indeed, 61 percent of parents near the poverty line cannot afford childcare of any kind, with many families suffering chronic hunger and/or being forced into homelessness.

The Trump regime is now overseeing the final shredding of a safety net already in tatters. The loss of childcare will plunge hundreds of thousands of families into desperate poverty.

According to the advocacy group First Focus on Children, in 2023 the cost to a family of childcare for two children in a center was more than annual mortgage payments in 45 states and the District of Columbia, while the cost for an infant’s childcare was more than in-state tuition at a public university in 39 states.

It should also be noted that the US remains among the bottom five of the 37-member Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in spending for early childhood education. While most OECD countries provide universal access, the US restricts access to its limited programs to the lowest-income families. Meanwhile, the US military budget is closing in on \$1 trillion and growing.



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