STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 942849
SACRAMENTO, CA 94249-0115

California Legislature

August 31, 2026

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren
Chair, California Democratic Congressional Delegation
1401 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. Senator Alex Padilla
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Congressman Ken Calvert
Dean, California Republican Delegation
2205 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. Senator Adam Schiff
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Defending and Advancing the Head Start Program

Dear Chair Lofgren, Dean Calvert, Senator Padilla, Senator Schiff, and Members of the California Congressional Delegation,

As members of the California State Legislature, we are writing to request your assistance to defend foundational education, health, family and home visiting services provided by Head Start to more than 85,000 children and their families across California. Head Start is critical infrastructure for advancing two-generation opportunity, equity, and economic resilience in our state.

California receives approximately $1.5 billion annually in federal Head Start funding, supporting essential services that extend far beyond traditional child care. Head Start provides early childhood education, medical, dental, developmental, and family services, as well as home visiting for families with infants and toddlers. These evidence-based services strengthen parent-child relationships, improve child outcomes, support family stability, and enable parents to pursue education and employment. We know quality, reliable child care encourages parents to pursue careers, strengthening the California workforce. Further, Head Start directly employs over 26,000 Californians and thousands of contractors who span countless service sectors.

We are deeply concerned by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' August 7 proposal to effectively eliminate all of the existing Head Start performance standards, the national framework that provides consistent expectations for quality and accountability, and replace them with minimal and often ambiguous guidance. While Head Start providers have raised legitimate concerns about overly prescriptive requirements and have made recommendations for thoughtful, targeted reforms, the wholesale elimination of the standards included in this draft would be akin to using a sledgehammer where a scalpel is needed.

If finalized as written, the proposed changes would fundamentally diminish the Head Start model by allowing larger class sizes, fewer teachers, reduced service hours, and lower staff qualifications. HHS

projects that these changes could reduce program costs by as much as $2 billion annually nationwide, raising serious concerns about the quality and intensity of services provided to some of our state's most vulnerable children and families.

Eliminating national standards and expectations would also create a significant administrative burden for local program staff, which would have to navigate federal statute and state licensing requirements rather than relying on one clear, consolidated performance framework. At the same time, larger classrooms and reduced workforce requirements will make recruitment and retention of qualified teachers even more difficult, potentially leading to classroom closures and fewer children served.

We therefore respectfully urge you to ask the Secretary of Health and Human Services to withdraw the current proposal and develop a replacement that:

- Builds upon feedback from the Head Start community to right-size the Head Start performance standards
- Offers clear, consistent guidance and performance expectations for all Head Start programs nation-wide, including compliance with the Head Start statute
- Retains high-quality standards related to group sizes, teacher to student ratios, intensity and duration of services, and other evidence-based program design elements that are driven by research on outcomes and effectiveness for at-risk young children and families.

In this moment, we must all renew our commitment to young children and families, especially those furthest from opportunity. Reform may be warranted, but eliminating the national framework would replace clear expectations with uncertainty and risk sacrificing the evidence-based quality and services that make Head Start effective.

We are grateful for your leadership and urge you to stand firm in defending and advancing this essential program.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Ahrens
CA State Assemblymember, District 26

Heather Hadwick
CA State Assemblymember, District 1

cc: Honorable James Gallagher; Honorable Jared Huffman; Honorable Kevin Kiley; Honorable Mike Thompson; Honorable Tom McClintock; Honorable Ami Bera; Honorable Doris Matsui; Honorable John Garamendi; Honorable Josh Harder; Honorable Mark DeSaulnier; Honorable Nancy Pelosi; Honorable Lateefah Simon; Honorable Adam Gray; Honorable Kevin Mullin; Honorable Sam Liccardo; Honorable Ro Khanna; Honorable Jimmy Panetta; Honorable Vince Fong; Honorable Jim Costa; Honorable David Valadao; Honorable Jay Obernolte; Honorable Salud Carbajal; Honorable Raul Ruiz; Honorable Julia Brownley; Honorable George T. Whitesides; Honorable Judy Chu; Honorable Luz Rivas; Honorable Laura Friedman; Honorable Gil Cisneros; Honorable Brad Sherman; Honorable Pete Aguilar; Honorable Jimmy Gomez; Honorable Norma Torres; Honorable Ted Lieu; Honorable Sydney Kamlager-Dove; Honorable Linda Sánchez; Honorable Mark Takano; Honorable Young Kim; Honorable Robert Garcia; Honorable Maxine Waters; Honorable Nanette Barragán; Honorable Derek Tran; Honorable Lou Correa; Honorable Dave Min; Honorable Darrell Issa; Honorable Mike Levin; Honorable Scott Peters; Honorable Sara Jacobs; Honorable Juan Varga

Attached signers from the California State Legislature
Re: Defending Standards and Advancing the Head Start Program letter

Sincerely,

Assemblymember Nick Schultz
44th Assembly District

Assemblymember Maggy Krell
6th Assembly District

Assemblymember LaShae Sharp-Collins
79th Assembly District

Assemblymember Michelle Rodriguez
53rd Assembly District

Assemblymember Rhodesia Ransom
13th Assembly District

Assemblymember Robert Garcia
50th Assembly District

Assemblymember Anamarie Ávila Farías
15th Assembly District

Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin
42nd Assembly District

Assemblymember Liz Ortega
20th Assembly District

Assemblymember Laurie Davies
74th Assembly District

Assemblymember Alex Lee
24th Assembly District

Assemblymember Rick Chavez Zbur
51st Assembly District

Senator Caroline Menjivar
20th Senate District

Assemblymember Marc Berman
23rd Assembly District

Attached signers from the California State Legislature
Re: Defending Standards and Advancing the Head Start Program letter

Sincerely,



Assemblymember John Harabedian
41st Assembly District



Assemblymember Tina McKinnor
61st Assembly District



Assemblymember Alexandra Macedo
33rd Assembly District



Assemblymember Tri Ta
70th Assembly District



Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry
4th Assembly District

Attached signers from the California State Legislature
Re: August 31, 2026 Defending Standards and Advancing the Head Start Program letter

Sincerely,
[SIGNATURE/DISTRICT #]

AD18
Assemblymember Mia Bonta

AD 37
Assemblymember Gregg Hart

AD69
Assemblymember Josh Lowenthal

AD50
Assemblymember Leticia Castillo

AD 49
Assemblymember Mike Fong

AD 42
Assemblymember José Luis Solache

AD 67
Assemblymember Sharon Quirk-Silva

AD52
Assemblymember Jessica Caloza

AD 59
Assemblymember Phillip Chen

AD76
Assemblymember Darshana Patel

AD77
Assemblymember Tasha Boerner

AD 54
Assemblymember Mark González

AD 32
Assemblymember Stan Ellis

AD 60
Assemblymember Mike Gipson

AD 28
Assemblymember Gail Pellerin

AD 17
Assemblymember Matt Haney

AD 80
Assemblymember David Alvarez

AD 22
Assemblymember Juan Alanis

Attached signers from the California State Legislature
Re: August 31, 2026 Defending Standards and Advancing the Head Start Program letter

Sincerely,
[SIGNATURE/DISTRICT #]

Heather Hadwick AD1

Assemblymember Heather Hadwick

AD47

Assemblymember Greg Wallis

AD 38

Assemblymember Jeff Gonzalez