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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Arreguín, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular

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<b>Bill No:</b>	AJR 12		
<b>Author:</b>	Ahrens		
<b>Version:</b>	May 14, 2025	<b>Hearing Date:</b>	August 27, 2025
<b>Urgency:</b>	No	<b>Fiscal:</b>	No
<b>Consultant:</b>	Diana Dominguez		

**Subject:** Head Start program

### SUMMARY

This resolution recognizes May 2025 as Head Start Month and urges the Congress and the President of the United States to protect and increase funding for Head Start.

### ABSTRACT

#### Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes the Head Start Act to promote the school readiness of low-income children by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. (*42 United States Code (U.S.C. 9831 et seq.)*)
- 2) Requires the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to award Head Start collaboration grants. (*42 U.S.C. 9837b(a)(1)*)
- 3) Requires the state director of Head Start Collaboration to develop a strategic plan to enhance collaboration and coordination of Head Start services, among other things; promote partnerships between Head Start agencies, state and local governments, relevant community-based organizations, and other organizations; consult with the chief state school officer, local educational agencies, and providers of early childhood education and development, at both the state and local levels; among other duties. (*42 U.S.C. 9837b(a)(4)*)
- 4) Defines “mixed-delivery system”, for purposes of the California Universal Preschool Planning Grant Program, as a system of early childhood education services that is delivered through a variety of providers, programs, and settings, including Head Start agencies, public, private, or propriety agencies, including community-based organizations, public schools, and local educational agencies that offer center-based childcare and preschool programs, tribal childcare and preschool, and family childcare through a family childcare home education network. (*Education Code (EDC) 8320(b)(2)*)

- 5) Requires school districts with early primary programs to provide educational continuity from preschool through kindergarten and grades 1 to 3, inclusive, by accomplishing the following:
- a. Establishing connections with public preschool programs, including state preschool, state child development, and federal Head Start programs.
  - b. Promoting connections among early primary programs that provide before- and after-school services.
  - c. Promoting joint activities for teachers and administrators of public preschool programs, including state preschool, state child development, and federal Head Start, and kindergarten and grades 1 to 3, inclusive. (*EDC 8974*)

**This Bill:**

- 1) Makes the following findings:
- a. May 18, 2025 marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Head Start. Since its founding by President Lyndon B. Johnson as part of his war on poverty, Head Start has helped over 40 million American children break the cycle of generational poverty.
  - b. While the Head Start program is fully federally funded, its future is uncertain amid proposals to significantly reduce federal spending.
  - c. Head Start California is a nonprofit association dedicated to ensuring California's children and families remain uplifted by the comprehensive services Head Start provides.
  - d. Head Start programs are best known for providing high-quality, parent-driven early childhood education for children from birth through five years of age. Head Start programs also provide health, nutrition, social-emotional, behavioral, and dental services.
  - e. Head Start programs uplift the entire family. Children who attend Head Start are more likely to complete high school and enroll in and complete college, and less likely to be involved in the justice system, to be in foster care, and to experience poor health. Parents of Head Start children are able to attain higher increases in educational attainment, improve their mental health, and deploy parenting practices that better support their children's cognitive development.
  - f. Investments in high-quality early childhood education programs like Head Start have been demonstrated to yield a seven to 10% return on investment based on increased school and career achievements and reduced remedial costs.
  - g. Head Start is an investment in building the American dream. In 2024, Head Start served 80,345 California children and their families, and directly employed 26,681 Californians with nearly \$1.5 billion in federal funding.

- h. California’s Head Start programs have been challenged—nearly to the point of closing their doors—by the April 1, 2025, closure of the Federal Regional Office responsible for processing grant applications, distributing funds, and providing technical assistance. Since January 2025, serious and unusual delays in the processing of federal payments to Head Start programs have repeatedly put programs at risk of closing.
- 2) Resolves that the Assembly and the Senate of the State of California, jointly, recognizes May 2025 as Head Start Month. Further resolves that the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, the Majority Leader of the United States Senate, each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States, and to the author for appropriate distribution.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

This resolution has been keyed non-fiscal.

### **BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Purpose of the Bill:**

According to the author, “AJR-12 recognizes May 2025 as Head Start Month and calls on Congress and the President to protect and increase funding to the Head Start program to support the 85,000 least advantaged California families and kids served with high-quality, early childhood education.”

#### *Head Start*

The federal Head Start program first began as an eight-week project under the Office of Economic Opportunity, established in 1965 as a component of President Johnson’s War on Poverty. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Head Start was designed to help break the cycle of poverty, providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs.”<sup>1</sup> In 1977, Head Start programs were launched in 21 states, and by 1984 the program’s grant budget was over \$1 billion. Head Start was most recently reauthorized through the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-134).

Today, the Head Start program serves children from birth to age five and pregnant women in core areas including early learning and development, health and wellness, family well-being, and family engagement<sup>2</sup>. Families are eligible if their income falls below the federal poverty

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<sup>1</sup> <https://headstart.gov/about-us/article/head-start-history>

<sup>2</sup> <https://headstart.gov/programs/article/head-start-approach>

guidelines; for example, a four-person family must have an income below \$32,150 to qualify in 2025.<sup>3</sup> Head Start services are provided in child care centers, family child care homes, or in the family's own home. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start awards grants directly to local public and private for-profit and nonprofit agencies. Grant funding is administered to agencies in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Tribal nations, and several U.S. territories.

According to data from Federal Fiscal Year 2024, California received 116 Head Start grants amounting to \$1.6 billion in total funding for 75,281 slots<sup>4</sup>. Of those enrolled approximately 9% were less than one year old, 13% were one-year-olds, 20% were two-year-olds, 31% were three-year-olds, 25% were four-year-olds, and 1% were five-year-olds or older. Additionally, of those enrolled, 2,815 were children in foster care, 8,051 were children experiencing homelessness, and 53,173 were Dual Language Learners.

### *Recent Federal Actions*

On January 27, 2025, the Office of Management and Budget issued a temporary freeze on funding for federal programs, which raised concerns among Head Start grantees. Head Start was later announced as exempt from the freeze, however, six programs in California reported having trouble accessing their payments<sup>5</sup>. On April 1, the Trump Administration announced the immediate closure of five of 12 regional offices that oversee Head Start, including the Region 9 office, which oversees California. According to the Associated Press, an internal early draft of the President's 2026 budget included a proposal to eliminate funding for Head Start<sup>6</sup>. This proposal aligned with Project 2025, a conservative policy agenda by the Heritage Foundation. However, the budget proposal released by the President in May did not include any changes to Head Start funding.

In June, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a notice<sup>7</sup> that revises the definition of "federal public benefits", effectively adding programs to those restricted to individuals with a "qualified" immigration status. Head Start is affected by this policy change. The notice was issued with an immediate effective date, before the conclusion of the 30-day public comment period. On July 21, California Attorney General Bonta announced a lawsuit against the Trump Administration over the "abrupt decision to restrict access to more than a dozen public benefit programs based on immigration status."<sup>8</sup> This lawsuit was filed jointly with the attorneys general of 19 other states and the District of Columbia. It is unclear how this change may affect Head Start programs.

On July 31, the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee approved the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (S. 2587)

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<sup>3</sup> <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>

<sup>4</sup> <https://headstart.gov/program-data/article/head-start-investments-state>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-02-07/head-start-grants-trump-funding-freeze>

<sup>6</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/head-start-trump-funding-budget-cuts-education-204077e046329eb22c71445d57ba002b>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/07/14/2025-13118/personal-responsibility-and-work-opportunity-reconciliation-act-of-1996-prwora-interpretation-of>

<sup>8</sup> <https://oag.ca.gov/news/press-releases/attorney-general-bonta-sues-trump-administration-over-cruel-directive-unlawfully>

which proposes to fund Head Start at \$12.4 billion. Additionally, the committee requested a report within 60 days of enactment that details the justification for the closures of regional offices. This represents the latest but not final budget decision, which must be negotiated between the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate and then sent to the President's desk for signature. This resolution urges Congress and the President to protect and increase funding for Head Start.

### **Related/Prior Legislation:**

**AJR 3 (Schiavo)** urges the President of the United States and Congress not to cut Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid benefits. AJR 3 is pending on the Senate Floor.

**SJR 3 (Arreguín, Chapter 151, Statutes of 2025)** urges the United States Congress to avoid any cuts to the SNAP program.

**AJR 12 (Chan, Chapter 72, Statutes of 2003)** requested the Congress of the United States to acknowledge the success and maintain the funding support of the Head Start program.

## **COMMENTS**

This resolution seeks to recognize the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the federal Head Start program, which has served over 40 million children since its founding. Head Start serves low-income families by provided children with care and education and enabling parents to go to work. According to the California Budget and Policy Center, in 2023, only 14% of eligible children were enrolled in subsidized child care programs in the state<sup>9</sup>. This translates to an estimated 286,000 children enrolled and 1.8 million children on waitlists or in informal care arrangements. When families cannot access child care, they often cannot attend school or work, which limits their family income and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. This not only harms families but also reduces workforce participation and economic stability. Head Start is fully funded by the federal government. Elimination or cuts to Head Start funding will both jeopardize low-income families' livelihoods and threaten the capacity of California's early care system.

## **PRIOR VOTES**

Assembly Floor:	74 - 0
Assembly Human Services Committee:	7 - 0

## **POSITIONS**

### **Support:**

Head Start California (Sponsor)

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<sup>9</sup> <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/the-unmet-need-for-child-care-remains-staggeringly-high/>

Community Action Partnership of Kern  
North Coast Opportunities, INC. Head Start Child Development Program  
Seiu California  
Sierra Cascade Family Opportunities

**Oppose:**

None Received

**-- END --**