

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 30, 2026

The Honorable Alex Adams
Assistant Secretary
Administration for Children and Families
330 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Assistant Secretary Adams:

We write to you with concern that the Trump administration's efforts to gut federal government child care programs, which have led child care centers across the country to shut down, are leaving American families and workers with few alternatives.¹ In January, we cautioned that deep staff cuts at the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) – coupled with numerous funding freezes² – would exacerbate the country's child care crisis. These actions raise fresh concerns about the extent to which the current administration is further destabilizing the country's already fragile child care system, increasing child care costs for families and making care harder to come by.

The Trump Economy is Straining Child Care Providers and American Families

American families face skyrocketing child care costs. In 2025, the cost of child care grew “faster than overall inflation,”³ and in the year ending May 2026, the cost of day care and preschool rose by 3.5 percent.⁴ The Trump administration's “economic and foreign-policy agenda,” which has increased the “prices of goods, gas, and health care,” is making this crisis more severe – “compounding existing challenges for families and child-care workers.”⁵ For providers, these price hikes mean the school supplies and food they provide their children are more expensive, as well as the cost of insuring their program, paying their rent and utilities, and maintaining their facilities.⁶ Under the weight of these crushing costs, providers are being forced into a lose-lose situation – raise tuition costs for families or shut down. A survey of child care providers from

¹ The Atlantic, “Child Care Is Buckling,” Elliot Haspel, April 30, 2026, <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/2026/04/child-care-funding-closures-trump/687003>.

² National Women's Law Center, “Attacks on Head Start are Part of a Sustained Strategy to Undermine Progress for Families with Low Incomes: A Timeline of the Trump Administrations Efforts to Eliminate the Program,” Karla Coleman-Castillo and Sonia Marton, May 3, 2026, <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Attacks-on-Head-Start-are-Part-of-a-Sustained-Strategy-to-Undermine-Progress-for-Families-with-Low-Incomes-Updates-May-2026-4.pdf>; Administration for Children and Families, “HHS Freezes Child Care and Family Assistance Grants in Five States,” press release, January 6, 2026, <https://acf.gov/media/press/2026/hhs-freezes-child-care-family-assistance-grants-five-states>.

³ The Century Foundation, “Still Unaffordable: Child Care's Rising Prices, Stretched Supply, and Staffing Shortages,” Laura Valle Gutierrez and Julie Kashen, December 10, 2025, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/still-unaffordable-child-cares-rising-prices-stretched-supply-and-staffing-shortages>.

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Consumer Price Index – May 2026,” June 10, 2026, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cpi.pdf>.

⁵ The Atlantic, “Child Care is Buckling,” Elliot Haspel, April 30, 2026, <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/2026/04/child-care-funding-closures-trump/687003>.

earlier this year found that over 90 percent of respondents experienced a rise in their material costs last year – which included the cost of food and supplies.⁷

Nearly two-thirds of center-based child care providers and almost a third of home-based providers reported their program increased tuition over the past year to meet the demands of rising costs.⁸ These price hikes come as families, already struggling with rapid inflation, “can least absorb them” – creating an ongoing cycle wherein “families that can’t afford child care tend to opt out of it altogether,” leading to under-enrollment that forces programs to again raise prices or shut down completely.⁹

The devastating impact of increased costs on the ability of providers to stay open is already taking shape. Recent reporting details how thousands of child care centers have closed since President Trump took office, taking with them thousands of child care slots for families. For example, in Oklahoma, over 400 day cares have shut down since November.¹⁰ In Indiana, more than 300 programs have closed their doors since last September – “representing more than 10,300 slots for children.”¹¹ And, during the last quarter of last year, hundreds of day cares in North Carolina closed.¹² Even some of the largest private providers have “closed more sites than [they] opened last year” and warn of more closures in the imminent future due to “the economy in general” and “instability” across the country.¹³ Child care programs affiliated with universities, like the University of Louisville, University of California Los Angeles, and Purdue University – in addition to some community colleges and hospital systems in Arkansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma – have also announced the closure of numerous child care centers.¹⁴ These closures put further strain on families’ budgets and can make it all but impossible for families to secure a spot in a child care program in their community.

The Trump Administration and ACF are Exacerbating the Child Care Affordability Crisis

Providers and parents are struggling under the weight of rising costs. Instead of addressing this problem, the administration has chosen to undermine the programs and rules that strengthen access to affordable child care.¹⁵ Starting with Head Start, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) unlawfully froze program funding for grantees mere weeks after President Trump took office – which forced some Head Start programs to temporarily close and left

⁶ The New York Times, “Why Does Child Care Seem Less Affordable Than Ever,” Asmaa Elkeurti and Claire Cain Miller, March 5, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/05/upshot/child-care-expensive-prices.html>; National Association for the Education of Young Children, “‘A Year of Tough Choices:’ The Child Care Affordability Crisis is Destabilizing Educators and Families,” February 2026, pp. 3-4, https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/user-174467/2026_survey_brief.pdf.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*; The Atlantic, “Child Care Is Buckling,” Elliot Haspel, April 30, 2026, <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/2026/04/child-care-funding-closures-trump/687003>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ The New York Times, “The Last Day at Kids of Faith: Parents Navigating a Child Care Crisis,” Vivian Yee, April 13, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/13/us/childcare-daycare.html>.

¹¹ The Atlantic, “Child Care Is Buckling,” Elliot Haspel, April 30, 2026, <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/2026/04/child-care-funding-closures-trump/687003>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

thousands of the country's most vulnerable families' child care with uncertainty¹⁶ – and withheld funding from grantees until they complied with the administration's rigid requirements.¹⁷ While the administration has created challenges for Head Start grantees, it has also simultaneously eliminated resources and offices at ACF that grantees rely on for assistance – firing 500 of the agency's employees and closing half of its regional offices.¹⁸ This left grantees struggling to access their funding with no administrative support, worsening the effects of the administration's withholding of funds. The administration followed these changes with draconian cuts to Medicaid and food assistance, jeopardizing access to these benefits for the approximately 43 percent of all early childhood educators who are on a form of public assistance, like Medicaid or food assistance, and the at least 230,000 child care providers – or one in four providers – who “rely on Medicaid for their health insurance.”¹⁹

In January 2026, ACF also announced it was freezing \$2.4 billion in Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) grants for a handful of blue states this past winter.²⁰ This freeze drew outrage, with states quickly challenging the legality of ACF's actions and the courts temporarily pausing the freeze as the lawsuits continued. Amidst this ongoing legal battle, ACF rescinded this freeze,²¹ however, if it had remained in place, it would have had dire consequences – limiting 500,000 children's access to care and potentially costing families more than \$400 million annually in lost parent earnings and costing businesses around \$119 million annually in reduced revenue from workforce disruptions.²² And there are no guarantees that you will not try this dangerous gambit again.

Once again, CCDF – and the families and providers it supports – is in jeopardy. In early May, ACF finalized a rule that rescinds Biden-era regulations aimed at lowering costs for families and

¹⁶ Reuters, “Trump administration violated law in delaying US Head Start education funding, GAO report finds,” Richard Cowan, July 24, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/trump-administration-violated-law-delaying-us-head-start-education-funding-gao-2025-07-23>; Los Angeles Times, “Head Start child-care centers face pay delays after Trump's federal funding freeze,” Jenny Gold, February 7, 2025, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-02-07/head-start-grants-trump-funding-freeze>.

¹⁷ EducationWeek, “Head Start Confronts More Funding Disruptions and Policy Whiplash,” Mark Lieberman, August 11, 2025, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/head-start-confronts-more-funding-disruptions-and-policy-whiplash/2025/08>.

¹⁸ The Imprint, “With States and Tribes Left Unattended, Fired Federal Child Welfare Workers Remain on Paid Leave,” Sara Tiano, June 12, 2025, <https://imprintnews.org/top-stories/with-states-and-tribes-left-unattended-fired-federal-child-welfare-workers-remain-on-paid-leave/261770>; Center for American Progress, “Closures of Head Start Regional Offices Jeopardize Critical Services for Children and Families,” Allie Schneider, April 29, 2025, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/closures-of-head-start-regional-offices-jeopardize-critical-services-for-children-and-families>.

¹⁹ The Century Foundation, “Beyond Health: Threats to Medicaid Funding Would Endanger Child Care Too,” Julie Kashen, March 5, 2026, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/threats-to-medicare-funding-would-endanger-child-care-too>.

²⁰ New York Times, “Judge Blocks Trump Officials From Freezing Billions in Social Services Funds,” Zach Montague and Minh Kim, January 9, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/09/us/politics/trump-child-care-funding-freeze.html>.

²¹ The New York Times, “Health Dept. Rescinds Freeze on \$10 Billion for 5 Democratic States,” Minh Kim, July 13, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/13/us/politics/trump-health-dept-funding-freeze-democratic-states.html>; Reuters, “US government rescinds \$10 billion freeze for 5 states governed by Democrats,” Kanishka Singh, July 13, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/us-government-rescinds-10-billion-freeze-5-states-governed-by-democrats-2026-07-14>.

²² The Century Foundation, “Trump's Child Care Funding Freeze in Five States Could Cost Families \$400 Million,” Julie Kashen, January 8, 2025, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/trumps-child-care-funding-freeze-in-five-states-could-cost-families-400-million>.

stabilizing supply.²³ Among the rules ACF rolled back were requirements that states cap families' copayments at seven percent of their income and pay providers on-time and based on enrollment.²⁴ These changes, which are fundamentally incompatible with child care providers' day-to-day operations, will "make poor families pay more out of pocket" and risk undoing the "recent positive changes in child care" that these requirements sparked.²⁵ Overturning these regulations also risks pushing child care providers out of business, as articulated by one provider in West Virginia who says, "if they take away enrollment-based pay, I will have to close. And I know a lot of other providers will as well."²⁶

ACF's Next Round of Changes Will Further Strain Families and Providers

In our January letter, we expressed concern that your actions would exacerbate the child care affordability crisis for families. Your response did not acknowledge the child care affordability crisis and provided no information on the impact of its cuts on the accessibility of child care.²⁷ Since then, ACF actions have only heightened families' concerns, as you have chosen to continue to eliminate federal child care resources. As a result, child care centers across the country are shutting down.

Among the changes is ACF's proposed rule to "overhaul" Head Start – a program hailed for its comprehensive quality standards – including the "loosen[ing] or elimination" of rules dictating child to teacher ratios, which experts warn will jeopardize the program's esteemed safety and quality.²⁸ These changes to Head Start are anticipated to "affect almost every other aspect of [the program]," such as "nutrition standards for meals and health standards that require staff to ensure that children get access to medical care."²⁹

We are deeply concerned by the steps ACF has already taken steps to limit access to child care. In May, the administration proposed a rule that would rescind wage standards for child care workers at Head Start – standards that required Head Start to update its pay scales, promote wage comparability across its programs and with public preschool teachers, and ensure salaries covered basic costs of living.³⁰ Together, these wage standards were estimated to increase the

²³ National Women's Law Center, "Trump Administration Finalizes Rule that Raises Costs for Families and Destabilizes Child Care System," press release, May 12, 2026, <https://nwlc.org/press-release/trump-administration-finalizes-rule-that-raises-costs-for-families-and-destabilizes-child-care-system-2>.

²⁴ New York Times, "Trump's Top Child Care Official Wants a 'Bonfire of Regulations,'" Coral Davenport, April 28, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/28/us/politics/child-care-regulations.html>.

²⁵ *Id.*; New American, "With CCDF Rule in Limbo, Next Steps for States Are Uncertain," Aaron Loewenberg, October 23, 2025, <https://www.newamerica.org/insights/with-ccdf-rule-in-limbo-next-steps-for-states-are-uncertain>.

²⁶ New York Times, "Trump's Top Child Care Official Wants a 'Bonfire of Regulations,'" Coral Davenport, April 28, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/28/us/politics/child-care-regulations.html>.

²⁷ Letter from ACF Assistant Secretary Alex Adams to U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, April 1, 2026, letter on file with the Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren.

²⁸ New York Times, "Trump's Top Child Care Official Wants a 'Bonfire of Regulations,'" Coral Davenport, April 28, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/28/us/politics/child-care-regulations.html>; The New York Times, "Trump Administration Plans to Upend Head Start by Deregulating It," Coral Davenport, updated August 3, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/31/us/politics/head-start-deregulation.html>.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ 91 FR 25842; Letter from Senator Bernard Sanders, Representative Bobby Scott, et al., to HHS Secretary Kennedy, June 11, 2026, https://democrats-edworkforce.house.gov/imo/media/doc/bicameral_letter_to_hhs_secretary_rfk_jr_regarding_head_start

majority of Head Start teachers' wages by \$10,000.³¹ The proposed rule goes even further to hurt providers, rolling back requirements for Head Start programs to provide their staff with health care coverage, paid leave, and behavioral health services³² – stripping staff of not just their wage protections, but their benefits as well.

Due to a lack of meaningful wage increases, Head Start programs face “frequent turnover,”³³ which has made the early education sector vulnerable and resulted in “fewer families receiving the high-quality programming that Head Start offers.”³⁴ As experts claim, the proposed changes risk further destabilizing Head Start programs by “deepening an existing supply crisis” – ultimately “limit[ing] Head Start’s ability to deliver high-quality care,” worsening coverage gaps, and pushing affordable child care options further out of reach for the families who need them most.³⁵ The administration’s harmful changes and cut-first, think-later approach raises our concern that ACF shares President Trump’s view that “we can’t take care of day care” and that you are not taking the child care affordability and availability crisis seriously.³⁶

American families have long struggled to access affordable, high-quality child care, but ACF’s actions now threaten a nationwide child care crisis. Families, already contending with a higher cost of living, will struggle without protections that target affordability, and providers will struggle to offer quality services without provisions that stabilize and safeguard their wages – as evident by the growing number of providers that are being forced to close their doors as costs rise. To inform our legislative responsibilities with regard to the nation’s child care system and the economy, we request that you provide the following information by October 14, 2026:

1. Does ACF track how many child care centers across the country close and the average cost of child care for a family? If so, please provide month by month data on how many child care centers have closed since January 2025 and how much the average cost of child care has increased over the past year.
2. How much Head Start grant funding did ACF provide to Head Start providers, and to how many providers, for each month of 2024, 2025, and 2026, to date?
3. How much CCDF grant funding did ACF provide to states for each month of 2024, 2025, and 2026, to date?
4. How is ACF supporting centers that have closed or are on the brink of closure?

[teacher_pay_raises.pdf](#).

³¹ *Id.*; K-12 Dive, “Most Head Start teachers to see \$10,000 salary jump under new HHS rule,” Kara Arundel, August 19, 2024, <https://www.k12dive.com/news/head-start-teachers-salary-benefits-rule-preschool/724536>.

³² 91 FR 25842.

³³ Letter from the Center of American Progress to HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., June 11, 2026, https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2026/06/CAP-Public-Comment-_Head-Start-NPRM-ACF-2026-0364.pdf.

³⁴ Letter from the Center for Law and Social Policy, the Center for American Progress, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, et al., to HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., June 11, 2026, <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2026/06/Community-Letter-Head-Start-NPRM-ACF-2026-0364.pdf>.

³⁵ *Id.*; Letter from the Center of American Progress to HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., June 11, 2026, https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2026/06/CAP-Public-Comment-_Head-Start-NPRM-ACF-2026-0364.pdf.

³⁶ NBC News, “Trump says it’s ‘not possible’ for the U.S. to pay for Medicaid, Medicare and day care: ‘We’re fighting wars,’” Eleanor Skelly, Alexandra Marquez, Tara Prindiville, and Sarah Dean, April 2, 2026, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-says-not-possible-us-pay-medicare-medicare-daycare-re-fighting-w-rcna266381>.

5. ACF's new finalized rule takes away key CCDF provisions that protect providers and maintain affordability for families. When finalizing this rule, did ACF take into consideration how rolling back these provisions could raise child care costs for families or the destabilizing effects eliminating these policies could have on the child care workforce?
- Specifically, has ACF done any analysis on how much child care costs will rise for families after the seven percent cap is rescinded? If so, please specify how much rescinding this cap will raise families' child care costs.
 - Has ACF done any analysis on how much costs will increase for providers or how many child care centers will have to shut down under this new rule? If so, please specify how much rolling back these rules will raise costs for providers and how many child care centers will be forced to close? Rescinding this cap will raise families' child care costs.
 - Does ACF have a plan to lower families' copayments that will replace this cap? If so, please explain how this plan will work to lower family co-payments, make child care more affordable for eligible families, and incentivize states to lower families' copayments in the absence of the seven percent rule.
 - How will HHS ensure states do not set their own caps at an unreasonably high or ineffective level, and how will the agency reduce disparities between states?
 - Does HHS have a plan to build up child care supply and strengthen the child care sector in the absence of enrollment-based, prospective payments to providers? If so, please explain how this plan will strengthen and build up the child care workforce.
6. Reports indicate that you plan on eliminating Head Start. You have already started to roll back key regulations that strengthen Head Start staffs' wages and benefits. What additional changes do you plan on making to Head Start's rules and regulations? Please specify all of the regulatory changes you plan on proposing.
- What is your timeline for proposing these regulatory changes to Head Start?
 - Will you ensure that any changes do not impact the availability of Head Start or hinder the high-quality care it has offered to families for decades?
 - Raising wages is key to building out child care supply, which is necessary for addressing the child care crisis. Without requirements directing Head Start to improve staff wages or provide its staff benefits, how will you ensure the program can hire and retain staff?

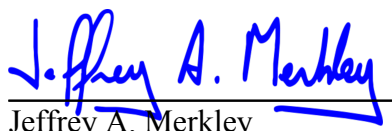
Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



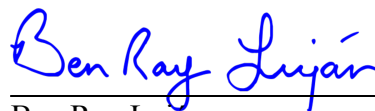
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Andy Kim
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator