

EMANUEL CLEAVER, II

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FIFTH DISTRICT, MISSOURI

COMMISSION ON SECURITY
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
(HELSINKI COMMISSION)

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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

April 30, 2025

Russel Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St NW
Washington, DC 20503

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Director Vought and Secretary Kennedy,

I am immensely concerned about a recent AP report of the Trump Administration's plan to cut all Head Start funding in FY26.¹

In the 60 years since its founding, Head Start has served nearly 40 million children² from urban and rural communities. Today, 790,000 children³, including 556,000 preschool children and 235,000 infants and toddlers, rely on this critical program. The abolition of Head Start is antithetical to our country's decades-long battle in the 'War on Poverty.' Often mischaracterized as a "handout," Head Start is a hand-up for low-income families nationwide. In Missouri's fifth congressional district, Head Start serves 2,256 children and employs 500 people. The program enables their employment by providing free/low-cost childcare, prenatal care for expecting mothers, and in-home services. Among Kansas City's Head Start parents, 1,351 are employed, 169 are in training programs, and 168 are enrolled in school.

Head Start allows educators who love teaching to teach kids to love learning. In its absence, 790,000 children and their families will enter a failing private childcare market. A recent study from the U.S. Department of Labor found that U.S. families spend between 8.9% and 16.0% of their median income on childcare⁴. Without Head Start, many families unable to afford private childcare would leave their jobs and become full-time caregivers. The remaining families who enter the market will face months-long waitlists and inflated prices. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, from January 2020 through September 2024, the average cost of day care and preschool rose 22%.⁵ Put simply, this is an unforced error.

¹ <https://apnews.com/article/head-start-trump-funding-budget-cuts-education-204077e046329eb22c71445d57ba002b>

² <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/5-things-to-know-about-head-start/#:~:text=Over%20the%20past%20six%20decades,than%20235%2C000%20infants%20and%20toddlers.>

³ <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/5-things-to-know-about-head-start/#:~:text=Over%20the%20past%20six%20decades,than%20235%2C000%20infants%20and%20toddlers.>

⁴ <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/wb/wb20230124>

⁵ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/10/25/5-facts-about-child-care-costs-in-the-us/>

PLEASE REPLY TO:

2217 RAYBURN HOB
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4535 (PHONE)
(202) 225-4403 (FAX)

4001 DR MARTIN LUTHER KING JR BLVD, STE 210
KANSAS CITY, MO 64130
(816) 842-4545 (PHONE)
(816) 833-2991 (FAX)

411 WEST MAPLE AVENUE, SUITE F
INDEPENDENCE, MO 64050
(816) 833-4545 (PHONE)
(816) 833-2991 (FAX)

To put families through this manufactured crisis is unconscionable. Please respond to the following questions **no later** than May 9, 2025:

1. Does the Administration plan to cut Head Start funding in its Fiscal Year 2026 budget? If so, to what level?
 - If so, how does the Administration plan to address the 790,000 children without childcare?
2. What plans does the Administration have to lower childcare costs?
3. Does the Administration have any assessments of how abolishing Head Start will impact the job market? If so, please provide these assessments.
4. Will the Administration commit to funding Head Start in FY26?
5. If you claim there is waste and fraud within Head Start, can you please cite concrete examples?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Emanuel Cleaver, II". The signature is stylized with a large, circular loop for the letter 'C' and a long, horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress