



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

August 19, 2026

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Alex J. Adams, Assistant Secretary
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy and Assistant Secretary Adams:

On behalf of the thousands of kids and working families across Wisconsin who rely on Head Start and Early Head Start programs every year, I am writing to urge you to withdraw the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) [“Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start”](#) published on Aug. 7, 2026. A proposal to dismantle Head Start, which has successfully served millions of families for 60 years, is the exact opposite of what Wisconsin needs from the federal government, and it should be rescinded and rejected outright.

Wisconsin is home to 42 Head Start and Early Head Start programs that served over 8,000 preschool-age kids, 4,000 infants and toddlers, and nearly 300 pregnant women last year alone. For many families, Head Start is the only place where kids and families experiencing poverty or homelessness, kids in foster care, or kids with disabilities can access early learning, health screenings, dental care, nutritious meals, developmental screenings and disability support, and family services in a safe and supportive environment. By eliminating almost all Head Start Program Performance Standards, this NPRM is a dramatic deregulation of nearly every aspect of this vital program and would strip essential services from Wisconsin’s kids and families who need them.

While my administration is still examining the full impact of this NPRM on the health, safety, and well-being of Wisconsin kids, families, and providers, several provisions already stand out as particularly harmful and cause for withdrawal. These include:

Elimination of ratios and group size limits that keep class sizes and caseloads small.

Current rules ensure that classrooms and caseloads are appropriate for the Head Start model; small enough to provide comprehensive care and service delivery that reflects the unique needs of every child and family. Instead, the proposed rule would default to state child care licensing standards, which are designed for a different child care delivery model and purpose. Billed as flexibility, this is simply less supervision, support, and safety for the kids who need it most, funded on the back of existing staff.

Removal of standards to ensure teachers are trained and supported, and requirements for key positions that keep kids safe.

The proposal removes education and training requirements that ensure high-quality, safe, and consistent programming and services, as well as provisions ensuring kids are not left alone with volunteers and requirements ensuring bus monitors are present during transportation. These changes undermine the quality, consistency, and safety kids and families deserve.

Removal of prohibitions on suspension, expulsion, and corporal punishment.

Head Start was designed to serve kids with the greatest needs, including those with behavioral challenges stemming from poverty, trauma, or disabilities. Reversing these protections puts already vulnerable kids at even greater risk.

Weakening of protections for kids with disabilities.

Current regulations provide clear guidance and expectations of how kids with disabilities should be identified, included, and served. The NPRM rescinds these regulations.

Increased barriers for kids experiencing homelessness.

Kids experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity face unique challenges, and current Head Start rules explicitly outline how programs should address barriers for this population. The NPRM rescinds these important protections.

Imposition of an English-only mandate.

The proposed rule would mandate English-only communication with a narrow exception for Tribes—eliminating long-standing requirements to support our youngest English learners, erasing requirements for programs to employ staff who speak kids' home languages, and cutting off kids and families from effective instruction and support.

Weakened health protection for Wisconsin's youngest kids.

The rule would remove mandatory hearing and vision screenings, mental health consultation requirements, and healthcare navigation support, putting more kids at risk for delayed intervention and treatment for health conditions with potentially significant impacts.

Reduced support for pregnant women and home visits, many of whom reside in rural areas.

The NPRM would remove federal caseload limits for home visitors, eliminate quality standards associated with home visits, and cut requirements to programs that help pregnant women secure health insurance and manage health risks. For many Wisconsin families, particularly in rural areas, Early Head Start home visits provide essential connections for pregnant women and young kids to needed services. *Early Head Start home visiting is the only home visiting option in 20 mostly rural counties in Wisconsin.*

Steep cuts to administrative funding needed for comprehensive services and program integrity.

While portrayed as savings, reducing the administrative funding cap from 15 to five percent would impact the family support staff, oversight, and data systems that keep programs consistent, high-quality, safe, and accountable.

In Wisconsin, we believe that what's best for kids is what's best for our state. Head Start provides critical support during a kid's earliest years, a time when their brains are forming more connections per second than at any other point in life and setting the stage for future success in school, work, and life. Eviscerating the standards and protections that have been the backbone of Head Start for decades won't expand access to the quality experiences, positive interactions, and support kids need to thrive. To give every kid the head start they deserve, the solution is increased investment and maintaining high standards, not cuts and lowering or eliminating altogether the basic standards and protections that keep our kids safe, healthy, and set them up for future success.

I urge you to withdraw this misguided NPRM, and I stand ready to work with you and anyone else pursuing real solutions to expand access to Head Start and improve the lives of kids and families across Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Tony Evers", with a stylized, cursive script.

Tony Evers
Governor

cc:

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