

Is Head Start funding on the federal chopping block? Ohio leaders fearful about Trump budget

By **Cole Behrens**
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Local providers of the federal program providing free child care to low-income families are concerned that thousands of Ohioans could be left without access to child care after the Trump administration is reportedly aiming to gut it.

[USA TODAY reported on April 11](#) that the Trump administration is considering a budget proposal that would eliminate funding for Head Start, which offers child care and preschool education to low-income families. Head Start was created during President Lyndon B. Johnson's "war on poverty" in 1965 to address early childhood education needs for families struggling with poverty.

Julie Stone, president of the Ohio Head Start Association, said in a prepared release that "the idea of eliminating Head Start is so damaging, we cannot afford to stay silent."

"Eliminating Head Start wouldn't just hurt children, it would upend the lives of working families across Ohio and devastate local economies," Stone said. "This is more than early learning. It's about access to health care, family stability, and long-term success."

USA TODAY reported that the White House's fiscal year 2026 funding blueprint does not allocate any money toward Head Start, but the administration declined to comment, saying "no final funding decisions have been made." A presidential budget proposal is like a "wish list" and would require congressional approval to move forward.

Local congressional representatives, including Republican Reps. Mike Carey and Troy Balderson, could not be reached for comment.

In Ohio, Head Start serves more than 27,000 pregnant women, infants, toddlers and preschoolers, according to the Ohio Head Start

Association. More than 7,000 Ohioans are employed by Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Additionally, the association said that more than 21,000 parents are able to work, go to school, or participate in job training each year thanks to the program.

Head Start provides no-cost, full-day early education and care for children from birth to age five, as well as medical, dental, vision, and hearing screenings and healthy meals and nutrition resources. It also provides family goal-setting and parenting support and referrals to housing, food, and mental health services. Nationally, 800,000 children and over one million parents benefit from the program each year.

Mikaila Bivens, spokesperson for local Head Start provider Child Development Council of Franklin Council, said the CDCFC serves nearly 1,700 children, more than 1,300 parents and dozens of pregnant women each year.

"We enrich the lives of children and families — we empower children, we empower their families so that they can have lifelong success," Bivens said.

Donald Fuzer, program director of The Ohio State University Child Care Program and University Early Head Start Partnership, said the risk to the program would not only impact families directly benefitting from it, but also the local and national economies. His office handles grants to child care contractors in the region.

He said that for every \$1 invested in it, local economies see \$7 to \$9 in economic benefits.

"The amount of money that comes into our state, those federal dollars — that's going to impact the overall economic landscape state of Ohio," Fuzer said.

Fuzer said that as a program created during the "war on poverty," Head Start is on the frontlines of impacting low-income families' lives.

"The majority of programs are really two-generational programs," Fuzer said. "It's not only a child program, it's not only a school-readiness and a social impact program for young children, but it looks at the whole family."

Fuzer said that if the funding for the program is cut, parents will have to make difficult decisions and seek alternative child care for their kids while they work that might be lower quality than what they are receiving now.

"I think a lot of our families that are enrolled in our program have to make some already difficult decisions on their own," Fuzer said, "but having to make a decision of where to put their child while they go out and they make a living for their family just kind of puts them in a precarious situation."

Stone encouraged concerned Ohioans to contact lawmakers "and voice strong support for protecting and preserving Head Start."

"This is a moment that demands action," Stone said. "We must advocate for the well-being of families not only in Ohio but throughout our nation."