

United States Senate

April 2, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

We write to express our serious concern regarding the recent decision to fire federal employees at the Office of Head Start (OHS) and Office of Child Care (OCC) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and we ask that you immediately reinstate these employees to full work status. Between the firing of probationary employees and the recent RIFs, these offices have been gutted and the ability for the federal government to support children and families and carefully oversee nearly \$25 billion in federal investments in early childhood programs will be extremely hampered. It appears these firings occurred without regard to employee performance, input from career civil servants, or planning against disruptions to understand the impact on children, families, child care providers, and Head Start programs.

This attack on employees at a time when children, families, child care providers, and early educators are relying on critical early childhood programs undermines the Department's role in administering and conducting oversight of early childhood programs, including Head Start programs and child care assistance for working-class families across the country. We are deeply concerned by reports of a high number of employees at OHS and OCC who have been fired across the country who provide critical support to Head Start programs and help make child care safer and more affordable. The termination of staff is alarming and will compound the challenges already facing these programs and services, including the lack of timely and transparent information, with no clear planning nor considerations for how early childhood services will be impacted.

The federal Head Start program currently serves nearly 800,000 children across the nation with comprehensive services to ensure children receive age-appropriate health care, dental care, and health insurance, and they provide referrals to other critical services for parents, such as job training, adult education, nutrition services, and housing support. For the last several years, there has been broad, bipartisan support in Congress to recognize the longstanding program's important work by providing increased appropriations. Head Start and Early Head Start grant recipients deliver services in every state and territory, farm worker camps, and over 155 Tribal communities. OHS provides Head Start programs with federal policy guidance, training, and technical assistance and administers grants in accordance to the Head Start Act. These federal employees play an important role to ensure that programs use their grant funds efficiently and effectively. Terminating OHS and Regional Office employees reduces the capacity to support and allow Head Start programs to use permissible flexibilities to effectively use their federal grant to best serve children in their communities.

Further, OCC administers the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), which includes the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) that provides an average of over 1.3 million children from nearly 800,000 families with low-income with child care subsidies monthly. The federal child care program is also central to states' efforts to ensure the health, safety, and quality of nearly every child care program in the country. OCC staff across the country support states in ensuring federal funds are used effectively to improve affordability, quality, and supply of child care options for families. These drastic terminations will weaken the ability to support states and oversee federal law, transparent information for families, professional development, and the timeliness and consistency of payment for child care providers.

The Administration's decision to reduce staff comes at a time when it is increasingly expensive to run child care and early learning programs, the cost of child care continues to be out of reach for many working-class families, and the demand for quality child care continues to far outpace the supply. According to a recent survey of more than 10,000 early childhood educators by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, more than half of programs indicated they were unable to serve their preferred number of children relative to their preferred capacity, with affordability and staffing challenges cited as the top reasons, rather than a lack of demand. We are deeply concerned about the exacerbation of these issues for child care providers and children and families as a result of the Administration's termination of a large portion of OHS and OCC staff, including the sudden closure of five of the ten Regional Offices and RIFs.

We ask that you immediately reinstate these employees to full work status, and we request your responses to the following questions by April 11, 2025:

- To date, how many staff have been terminated within OHS and OCC, both in the Central office and in each Regional office? Please share the reasoning behind the closure of offices in regions 1, 2, 5, 9, and 10 (Boston, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Seattle), and what information and planning were used to decide which and how many of these offices would be closed?
- Who decided which probationary and non-probationary employees within OHS and OCC were to be terminated and under what cause?
- What assessment was done about the impact of the RIFs on children and families served by the programs? What are the steps being taken to minimize disruptions and continue the administration of Head Start programs and CCDF?
- Was a review conducted to determine the impact of terminating OHS and OCC staff on early childhood programs, the impact on health and safety in care settings, the stewardship of nearly \$25 billion in taxpayer dollars, the ability to meet the purposes of the federal statutes, and the impact on children, families, and communities?
- Are there plans for additional staff terminations in the months ahead, and if so, how many and what offices?

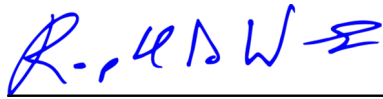
- Regional office staff are the first point of contact for Head Start programs and State and Tribal child care agencies. Who are the new points of contact for programs? If this work has been reassigned to remaining regional offices, how will doubling their workloads create a system that is responsive to pressing program needs?
- What percent of the Office of Grants Management team responsible for Head Start and Child Care programs have been fired since January? Can you guarantee that once a grant is awarded that grant recipients can draw down their awards?
- Can the Secretary guarantee that funds will be awarded on time for Head Start grant recipients that are due to receive a new or continuing award on May 1st, and subsequent awards? If there are lapses in awarding grants, how long will they last and what communication will be done to support programs in the interim?

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue, and we look forward to your response.

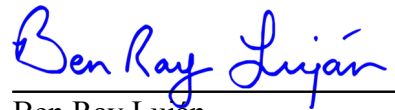
Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



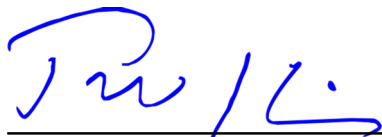
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Angela Alsobrooks
United States Senator



Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



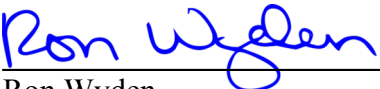
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



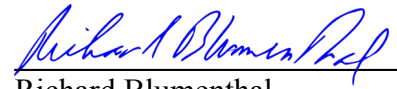
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



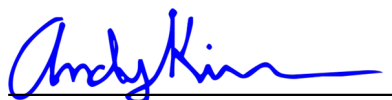
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



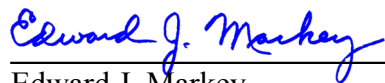
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Ruben Gallego
United States Senator



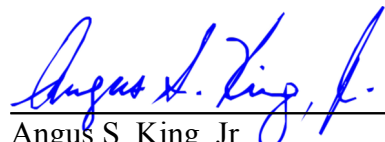
Andy Kim
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator