

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 9, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We are writing to express concern with your April 1, 2025, announcement that the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Head Start (OHS) plans to close five regional offices across the United States, including the Region 5 office in Chicago. This announcement—which contained no guidance for grantees in impacted regions—has created confusion and chaos for Head Start centers, employees, and families across various states, including those in Region 5 (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin). It also has impacted the jobs of 21 federal workers and 12 contractors.

The Head Start program serves children and families who are most in need in both rural and urban communities across our states. In Region 5, more than 2,600 Head Start centers provide high-quality child care for nearly 125,000 children, including children from nearly 2,400 active duty or military veteran families. These centers also employ more than 40,000 child care professionals. The staff in the Region 5 office helped these centers serve children and families efficiently and effectively, including monitoring budgets, enrollment, and audits.

Region 5 federal employees and grantees received no warning about the Chicago office closure, and since the announcement, grantees have received no guidance about how they will access training and technical assistance. Head Start centers run on tight budgets, and without a regional office, grantees will not be able to receive approval to draw down funds, forcing many to consider laying off staff—or even shuttering their doors. This will have devastating effects for children, families, child care workers, and the economy if children fail to receive care, child care staff lose their jobs, and parents cannot go to work.

HHS' closure of the Chicago regional office for Head Start compounds the challenges Head Start grantees already faced after the Trump Administration's reckless January 27, 2025, Office of Budget and Management memo that paused federal funding. After this memo was released, Head Start grantees were locked out of the system used to access grant funding, causing some centers to furlough staff and temporarily close their doors. Days later, after the Trump Administration clarified that the funding freeze was not meant to impact Head Start, child care centers still struggled to access their funding.

To better understand how the closure of the Region 5 office may impact our constituents, we ask that you provide answers to the following questions by April 22, 2025:

1. There was no guidance or additional information offered in the April 1, 2025, announcement to close five regional Head Start offices. Who can grantees in impacted regions contact for more information?
2. When does HHS plan to notify Region 5 grantees about relocation?
3. Which region will Region 5 grantees be relocated to?
4. When does HHS plan to begin the relocation of Region 5 grantees to a new regional office?
5. What is HHS' plan to ensure that grantees have timely access to drawn down funds before the relocation and during the relocation process?
6. Five of the 12 Head Start regional offices were shuttered. This means that the remaining seven regional offices will have to pick up grantees from other regions. How will HHS ensure that fewer staff are able to adequately serve more grantees?
7. Prior to the announcement on April 1, 2025, did HHS undertake any examination to ensure that services to help Head Start child care centers throughout Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin will not be impacted by a relocation?
 - a. If yes, please outline how HHS plans to guarantee that support for Head Start grantees will not be impacted.
8. Will federal employees formerly employed in the Chicago office be given the option to relocate?

We appreciate your timely attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



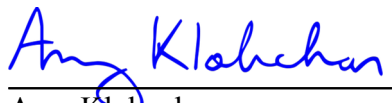
Tammy Duckworth
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Gary C. Peters
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