

## Media Statement

### R7HSA Opposes Federal Proposal That Would Dismantle Head Start Program Standards

Statement from Region VII Head Start Association Interim Executive Director, April Noe

**Lees Summit, MO** (August 10, 2026) – The Region VII Head Start Association (R7HSA) today issued a formal statement strongly opposing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' recent federal proposal, "Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs," which seeks to dismantle long-standing core Head Start Program Performance Standards.

The proposed federal overhaul, unveiled on August 6, 2026, represents the largest regulatory restructuring in the program's 60-year history. R7HSA is very concerned that removing these federal safeguards will strip away essential health, safety, and educational protections for more than 19,956 Head Start and 10,435 Early Head Start families served across the four-state region.

"Every day, we see how Head Start changes lives for the better," said April Noe, Interim Executive Director of R7HSA. "This isn't just professional for me; it's deeply personal. My own foster children benefited from Head Start, and it is heartbreaking to see provisions designed to protect our most vulnerable children removed from national standards. We support meaningful efforts to reduce administrative paperwork, but eliminating quality standards fundamentally breaks the promise Head Start makes to families."

According to R7HSA, the proposal creates critical risks for local early childhood systems:

- **Compromised Classroom Safety:** The rule eliminates Head Start-specific classroom ratios and group sizes. It defers instead to varying state licensing laws, risking crowded classrooms and reduced individualized attention.
- **Reduced Specialized Support:** Key requirements for serving children with disabilities and multilingual learners would be cut, threatening equitable classroom access.
- **Loss of Family Governance:** Long-standing mandates for parent committee oversight and structural program engagement would be dissolved.
- **Funding Cuts to Direct Services:** By restructuring overhead caps, the proposal threatens the ability of local operators to use federal funds for everyday operational costs, forcing programs to reduce services or serve fewer children.

In many rural and underserved areas, Head Start remains the only accessible provider of comprehensive early learning, nutrition, and family health screenings. R7HSA emphasizes that national standards guarantee a baseline of quality that protects taxpayers and ensures children receive equal support regardless of where they live. "Since 1965, Head Start has represented a promise to families that children will receive high-quality early learning and comprehensive support. We believe that promise should continue for every child and family, in every community," Ms. Noe stated.

The proposal is now open for public comment. Current Head Start standards remain in effect, and local programs continue operating under existing requirements while the federal rulemaking process moves forward. R7HSA encourages parents, educators, community members, and all Head Start supporters to oppose the changes outlined in this proposal and make their voices heard through the federal public comment process. Public comments are an important opportunity to share how these proposed changes would harm the children and families who rely on Head Start in their communities, and to urge HHS to withdraw or substantially revise the proposal before issuing a final rule. **The public comment period is open through October 6.**

## **About Region VII Head Start Association**

Region VII Head Start Association (R7HSA) is a nonprofit organization that supports federal Head Start and Early Head Start grant recipients in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. R7HSA seeks to ensure quality services for children and families by promoting and supporting the effectiveness of State Head Start Associations, Local Head Start Programs, and members. The collaborative commitment of R7HSA is to meet the needs and challenges of the membership and stakeholders of the organization. R7HSA is committed to looking to the future, meeting the challenges ahead, focusing on excellence and making a positive difference in the lives of children and families.

## **Media Contact**

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