

Regulatory Proposal Impacting Head Start Staff

Director Khari Garvin: Hi, I'm Khari Garvin, the director of the Office of Head Start in Washington, D.C., at the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Every day, families rely on Head Start programs to be high-quality, safe spaces for their children to learn and grow all across this country, in cities and in small towns, in U.S. territories, and in tribal nations. You, the staff who work with the children and families, are the most critical part of the delivery of Head Start services.

Recently, our office proposed updates to the Head Start Program Performance Standards, which outline the requirements for all Head Start programs. We are collecting feedback on these proposed changes from you and other members of the public, before making final decisions and publishing revised standards. Allow me to highlight a few of these changes, which are designed to stabilize and grow the Head Start workforce and improve the quality of the comprehensive services that Head Start families can count on.

The proposed changes would require Head Start programs to offer staff fair wages and competitive benefits. We know the success of Head Start programs rests on the dedicated staff who choose to work in our programs. Each staff person plays an integral role in the services we deliver to children and families. From teachers and home visitors to the cooks and custodians, to family services staff, bus drivers, and of course, our managers and leaders.

Over the last ten years and more, the credentials of Head Start staff have increased, but your pay has not kept pace! We know that is why we are losing qualified teachers and other staff to other sectors like the retail or food service industries. We want to enable Head Start and Early Head Start staff to build long term careers in the program, staying in jobs they love where they serve their community in meaningful ways.

For these reasons, the proposed changes would require Head Start programs to compensate staff with salaries and benefits that are competitive with local elementary schools, and to offer living wages based on the cost of living in their area. The proposed changes would also protect the Head Start workforce by requiring programs to set up an environment that promotes staff wellness.

Many programs have already taken important steps in this area, but we propose that every Head Start program allow staff to take breaks, both regularly scheduled breaks and quick unscheduled breaks. We want to ensure classrooms have adult sized furniture in them, and that staff can access mental health supports whenever needed. We expect these changes will help our staff bring themselves more fully to their work with children and families and create an environment where each Head Start program is truly a great place to work.

We also propose other changes to the standards to improve the high-quality services that Head Start programs are known for. These changes would include enhancing mental health supports for children and families, capping the maximum caseload of family service workers, as well as other changes.

Here at the federal Office of Head Start, we designed these proposals after listening to people in the field like you and reading up on the latest research from experts. But now, we are asking you directly: What do you think about these proposed changes to the standards? How would they impact you? Do you think they would be good for the Head Start program? How do you foresee them impacting your community?

Your engagement is essential to making sure we continue to improve Head Start programs nationwide. Now is the time to give us comments on this proposed rule. Your thoughts should be shared on a website called the Federal Register. You can find out more information about the proposed policies and how to share your thoughts by following the QR code or the link to the ECLKC website on your screen.

We at HHS are committed to being responsive to evolving needs of the communities we serve and ensuring that Head Start remains the gold standard program for early care and education for children and families. Thank you for being a part of the Head Start family. We wouldn't be here without you. So long.