

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Trump Budget Proposal Seeks to Eliminate Head Start Funding, Raising Alarm Over Impact in Virgin Islands

The Trump administration's draft 2026 budget seeks to eliminate all funding for the Head Start program, prompting concern among parents and educators nationwide due to potential severe impacts on early childhood education and support services.

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Dept. of Human Services' Frederiksted Head Start Center.

A recent draft of the Trump administration's fiscal year 2026 budget proposes eliminating all federal funding for Head Start, a development that has stirred significant concern among educators, parents, and policymakers. Head Start, a long-standing federal

program, provides early childhood education, health services, nutrition, and parental support to low-income families across the nation, including the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The proposed budget allocates zero dollars for Head Start, effectively calling for the program's complete elimination. According to Education Week, this proposal aligns closely with the conservative agenda outlined in Project 2025, which seeks to significantly reduce federal involvement in social services and education programs. Though the budget has not yet been approved by Congress and is subject to change, it signals a stark shift in federal priorities regarding early childhood support.

V.I. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, speaking in a Facebook video posted on April 23, warned of the serious local consequences if the proposal moves forward. "The proposed cuts would have massive impact across the board, particularly on social services," Plaskett said. "Let's take Head Start. Presently about 1,000 children [in the U.S. Virgin Islands] participate in Head Start, funded by the federal government." She continued, "We have \$42 million going into building Head Starts around the Virgin Islands. However, they have proposed actually zeroing out any funding for Head Start. That means the closure of all of these schools, firing of all of the teachers, and families will have to find other ways to provide care and support child care education for children at the most vulnerable state, the youngest."

Plaskett stressed the program's proven success in preparing children for future academic achievement. "We know that children in Head Start do way better in school later on down the line because of the support they've gotten in the beginning. But Republicans want to hold us all back by zeroing out the funding in Head Start," she said. "We've got to speak up, and remember, what happens in Washington affects us here."

Supporters of the Trump administration's proposed budget argue that federal funding for programs like Head Start should be phased out, allowing local communities, charitable organizations, and private initiatives to take on a greater role. Proponents believe that such a move would encourage economic efficiency, reduce federal spending, and help curb the national deficit.

The Head Start program, established in 1965, has a significant budget. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the total federal funding for Head Start in fiscal year 2022 was approximately \$11 billion. This funding supports a range of services, including early childhood education, health screenings, and parental involvement initiatives.

Anxiety is growing within the early childhood education sector nationwide. A report from the Associated Press highlighted that mass layoffs are already beginning to affect Head Start centers across the country, leaving educators and administrators increasingly concerned about the program's future. Leaders in the sector warn that without federal support, access to early childhood education will be dramatically reduced, especially for low-income families.

Time magazine also reported that the proposal to eliminate Head Start funding is part of a broader conservative push to minimize federal intervention in education and social welfare, reflecting a fundamental reshaping of the government's role in providing social services.

