NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER

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OCTOBER 2026 FACT SHEET

The Trump Administration's Ongoing Attacks on Child Care, Families, & Working Women

It's no exaggeration to say that child care is the backbone of our workforce, enabling millions of people to earn a paycheck and support their families. And federal funding is essential to the child care system: state and local child care systems rely on federal funding to help families afford care and to ensure the safety of child care settings for all children. Because women disproportionately bear the responsibility for caregiving, child care is especially important for working women — both as parents and as members of the primarily female child care workforce.

Despite, or maybe because of the connection between child care and women's economic success, the United States has failed to make the investments needed to fully support this foundational sector. As a result, families cannot afford child care, early educators are paid poverty wages, and providers struggle to keep their doors open.

Not only has the Trump-Vance administration offered no solutions to these problems, their ongoing attacks on child care are making the child care crisis *worse* for working women and their families. While the administration seems to be intent on pushing women to have more babies, it is simultaneously dismantling and disparaging the very systems — like child care — that help women feel ready and supported to have those children.

They are part of the Trump-Vance administration's overarching campaign to undermine women's economic opportunity and push a pronatalist agenda because they view women's power as a political threat. And they are already harming millions of working women who rely on child care to earn a living, including early educators and providers.

That's why it is critical to understand what the Trump-Vance administration is doing to undermine women and families who rely on child care and how those actions fit into a broader conservative

agenda: **Attacking child care harms women, children, families, employers, and the economy as a whole, and it leaves all of us worse off**.

DISRUPTING FEDERAL CHILD CARE FUNDING TO STATES

One of the core ways the Trump-Vance administration has been undermining the child care system is by freezing or otherwise disrupting the flow of critical federal funding for some states and imposing vague and burdensome reporting requirements on all states. Together and separately, these actions make it harder for states to get the funding they need and because child care businesses operate on such thin margins, any amount of uncertainty or delay in funding can be "catastrophic."

Freezing Child Care Funding to Five States: On December 30, 2025, the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), which houses the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), announced via social media that they had "frozen all child care payments" to the state of Minnesota in direct response to a YouTuber's unfounded claims of fraud at Minnesota child care centers. Soon after, on January 6, 2026, HHS froze access to over $10 billion in federal funding for child care and other vital basic needs programs to five states with Democratic governors. The Five-State Funding Freeze — which a federal judge preliminarily blocked on February 6, 2026 — made states' access to funds contingent on releases of sensitive information about providers and participants that had never been previously required. These actions threatened access to child care for at least 300,000 children, creating untenable uncertainty for parents and child care providers alike.

Imposing Excessive Red Tape to Access Child Care Funds: Also on December 30, 2025, HHS and the HHS Department of Government Efficiency ("DOGE") implemented an "Enhanced Defend the Spend" policy. This new policy adds meaningless red tape for states, which are now required to give the government never-before-requested information, like "a receipt or photo evidence," before the state can access already-allocated funds for child care. The government was vague about the substance and process of the new policy, including what information states had to provide, whether every state had to provide the same information, who in the administration would review and "verify" the information, and what standards they would use to do so. This uncertainty caused providers and families "significant distress" because it threatened to delay funds providers rely on for daily operating expenses like salaries and rent, making it even harder for providers to keep their doors open.

In March 2026, NWLC, along with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other civil rights groups, filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request demanding that the administration tell the public about the basis for its decision to block federal child care funds and impose new reporting requirements that make those funds harder to access. HHS refused to release any records in response to that FOIA request, so in July 2026, NWLC and partners filed a lawsuit seeking a court order requiring HHS to promptly process our FOIA request and release all non-exempt records. As of this publication, we still have not received any requested records.

Weaponizing Trillions in Federal Funding to Serve the Administration's Extreme Agenda: In May 2026, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), led by one of the chief architects of Project 2025, Russell Vought, released a new proposed rule. The proposed rule would radically upend the way over $1 trillion in federal funding is granted, shifting the power to make decisions – including about federal child care programs – to political appointees handpicked by the president. The rule seeks to enforce compliance with the president's priorities and is straight out of Project 2025.

What's more, the proposed rule ignores the conditions laid out by Congress and instead would give radical new authority to political appointees to determine who gets funding, what obligations are placed on grantees, and how and when grants are terminated. It intentionally attempts to subvert Congressional authority and action, to demote expert opinions within agencies, and to introduce substantial risks of unpredictability, misuse, and corruption within the grantmaking process. It is a blatant attempt by the Trump-Vance administration to hijack the federal grants system — a system through which the government funds critical programs and services like child care across the country — and reshape it to enforce the administration's vindictive and discriminatory agenda.

UNDERCUTTING FEDERAL CHILD CARE POLICIES AND SAFEGUARDS

Another Trump-Vance tactic for undermining child care is rolling back regulations and weakening support for federal programs that help families across the country afford and access child care.

Firing Staff from Federal Child Care Offices: In February 2025, the Trump-Vance administration fired a significant percentage of staff at the ACF Office of Child Care (OCC) and Office of Head Start (OHS) and in April 2025 it closed five out of ten regional child care offices which had served 22 states. The experts in these offices helped maximize federal funds to help ensure the health and safety of all children in child care and to lower the cost of child care. Their absence will make it even harder for children and families to access the care they need.

Raising Child Care Costs and Destabilizing the Child Care System: In May 2026, the Trump-Vance administration repealed a Biden-era child care rule that would have paid providers more fairly and lowered families' costs. The Biden-era rule helped keep child care affordable for families receiving federal child care assistance, capping copayments at 7% of a family's income. The rule also provided greater financial stability for child care programs by paying providers the same way private-pay families do. The Trump-Vance administration's rule, in contrast, will lead to higher child care costs for many families and allow lower payments to providers. This will make child care harder to access for all families. A group of labor unions represented by Democracy Forward have challenged the administration's changes to this rule; their case is ongoing.

ATTACKING HEAD START

Head Start is a vital federal program that provides early education, healthcare, nutrition, and parent support services to children from birth to age five, as well as support for pregnant women with low incomes. The Trump-Vance administration's attacks on the Head Start program can be traced directly to Project 2025's proposal to fully eliminate the program.

Freezing Federal Head Start Funds: The Trump administration began its targeted assault on Head Start in January 2025 by freezing all Head Start funding. While Head Start funding was eventually released, a 43-day government shutdown in late 2025 led to further delays in federal funds. These delays created major problems for programs across the country, many of which struggled to access their payments, and some of which were forced to close temporarily. The funding disruption left families and providers with unstable and unpredictable access to their main child care arrangement and other critical services.

Illegally Prohibiting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Activities in Head Start: In March 2025, Head Start programs were told they could not use Head Start funds for program activities that included diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Not only were the warnings vague about what actually constituted a "DEI initiative," the warnings directly contradicted Head Start's inclusive mission, including to serve children with disabilities. This left grantees at a loss for how to comply with both this vague directive and the Head Start statute all while continuing to meet the needs of the children in their care. In December 2025, the administration went further, banning programs from including almost 200 commonly used words (like "Black" and "women") on their federal funding applications. A coalition of parents and Head Start providers, represented by the ACLU and other organizations, filed a lawsuit and won a preliminary injunction, halting the ban on diversity, equity, and inclusion activities along with others of the administration's attacks on Head Start.

Excluding Immigrants from Head Start: In July 2025, the Trump administration reinterpreted longstanding guidance to block certain immigrant families from accessing Head Start (among other critical programs). Following intense public opposition and in response to the ACLU's lawsuit on behalf of parents and Head Start providers discussed above, a federal judge blocked the Trump administration from implementing or enforcing this ban.

Attempting to "Deregulate Head Start Out of Existence:" In May 2026, the Trump Administration published a proposed rule that would, among other things, repeal wage and benefits requirements for Head Start employees. National early education leaders, parents, providers, and community members rallied to explain how the proposed rule would undermine key elements of the program. A final wages and benefits rule is expected before the end of 2026.

In August 2026, the administration issued another proposed rule that seeks to overhaul the regulations that underpin Head Start's effective, high-quality, wraparound services model. On top of eliminating approximately 90 percent of Head Start's robust performance standards, the proposed rule introduces an English-only instruction requirement that would harm immigrant families, dual language learners, and Head Start staff. The proposal appears to contradict federal law in multiple

ways and would significantly weaken Head Start if implemented. Communities and leaders rallied once again to protect this vital program, submitting nearly 40,000 comments representing all 50 states in opposition to the proposed rule.

UNDERMINING CARE THROUGH THE BIG UGLY LAW

In July 2025, Congressional Republicans passed the administration's signature tax and budget bill on a party line vote. H.R. 1, drastically cut funding for basic needs programs like Medicaid and SNAP to give more tax cuts to billionaires and big corporations, and to fund the administration's anti-immigrant agenda. The passage of this bill is part of the administration's broader attacks on women and families because it harms both early educators and the families who most struggle to afford and access child care.

Slashing Funding for Basic Needs Programs: The law's unprecedented cuts to health care and food assistance will hit the care economy especially hard: over 40% of early educators rely on Medicaid and SNAP because wages and benefits in the industry are so low. Indeed, there is evidence that SNAP cuts are already preventing women and families from receiving benefits: between July 2025 (when H.R. 1 was enacted into law) and July 2026, over five million fewer people nationwide participated in SNAP. Additionally, the law's changes to Medicaid, which will be implemented in 2027, will lead to an estimated 10 million people (an eighth of enrollees) losing their coverage by 2034. Without these benefits, fewer early educators will be able to support themselves and their families: more early educators will be forced to leave their jobs, fewer will enter the care workforce, and the already insufficient supply of care will further diminish — all of which will deepen the child care crisis.

Forcing States to Scale Back Investments in Care: By shifting a larger share of SNAP and Medicaid costs to states, the law also puts enormous strain on state budgets. As a result, many states may cut investments in early childhood education to balance their budgets. Reducing these critical public investments will cause families' child care bills to rise and child care programs to close. And, of course, as families see their own health and food costs rise under this law, paying for child care will become even more difficult.

Targeting Immigrant Families and Early Educators: The law specifically excludes even more immigrant families, including families who are lawfully present in this country, from tax benefits and basic needs programs. This will deprive many immigrants — who represent 20 percent of the early educator workforce — of food assistance, health care, and income support. The bill also significantly increases funding for immigration enforcement activities, which puts early educators at risk and undermines the child care system that relies on their work.