

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1304

Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

We write to express our strong opposition to your Administration's proposed rule that would require Head Start programs to deliver all educational instruction in English, regardless of a child's primary language or level of English proficiency.¹ Such a requirement would undermine access to culturally and linguistically appropriate early childhood education for children and families across the United States, including Puerto Rico, where the proposal raises particularly troubling historical and cultural concerns. Given these grave ramifications, we urge you to withdraw this proposal immediately.

Head Start has long recognized that children learn best when educational programs reflect their developmental needs, home languages, and family experiences. For decades, Head Start programs have supported English language development while respecting the linguistic and cultural identities of the communities they serve.² Requiring English-only instruction would jeopardize these longstanding practices and undermine the program's mission of promoting school readiness and expanding educational opportunities for children from low-income families.

We are particularly concerned that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has pointed to your Executive Order 14224, Designating English as the Official Language of the United States, as justification for the proposed changes. While the executive order establishes English as the official language of the United States, it does not require federal agencies to eliminate multilingual services or educational approaches. Using this order to justify restrictions on home-language instruction would impose unnecessary barriers on the roughly 700,000 young children and their families who depend on Head Start.³

As Members of Congress representing diverse communities in Illinois, we know firsthand the importance of preserving access to multilingual early childhood education. In Chicago,

¹ *Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs*, 91 Fed. Reg. 51,248 (proposed Aug. 7, 2026) (to be codified at 45 C.F.R. pts. 1301-1305).

² 45 C.F.R. § 1302.31(b)(2) (2025).

³ Salomon, Gisela. "This Head Start center teaches in two languages. A Trump overhaul would require one: English." September 30, 2026. Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/head-start-preschool-english-spanish-trump-f22fd386528dad6aa2d1b12f0c787fc6>.

organizations such as El Valor have spent decades preparing children for academic success while serving families whose primary language is not English. Its Head Start programs incorporate dual-language education, recognizing that children need not sacrifice their home language to succeed in an English-speaking society.

Similarly, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs throughout Illinois provide essential early childhood education and family support services to agricultural workers and their children. These programs serve families whose languages, cultures, and experiences reflect the diversity of our nation. Their ability to provide linguistically responsive instruction is not incidental to their mission; it is fundamental to meeting the needs of children and families they serve.

While the consequences of this proposal would be felt nationwide, its implications for Puerto Rico are especially concerning given the island's history with federally imposed English-language instruction. Following the United States' invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898, federal authorities sought to impose English as the language of instruction in Puerto Rican schools. These efforts formed part of a broader campaign of colonial imposition and homogenization that Puerto Rican educators, parents, and communities resisted for generations. The era even spurred a literary movement, la Generación del 45, with stories like "*Peyo Mercé enseña inglés*," to collect, preserve, and reaffirm Puerto Rican national identity and the everyday struggle against attempts at North American cultural assimilation, including English as a required language of instruction. Spanish was restored as the primary language of instruction in Puerto Rico's public schools in 1949.⁴ The proposed Head Start requirement threatens to revive a conflict that should have been settled long ago.

Spanish is the predominant language of Puerto Rico. It is the language through which children communicate with their families, learn from their communities, and begin to understand the world around them. It is central to the island's educational system, cultural heritage, and collective identity. Requiring federally funded childhood programs to prioritize English-only instruction would disregard these realities and risk repeating harmful assimilationist policies that have already been rejected.

Your Administration's proposal recognizes the importance of language preservation by providing an exception for qualifying American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start programs using Native languages to further tribal heritage.⁵ We support protecting these programs and their ability to preserve Indigenous languages and cultures.

However, we question why comparable consideration has not been extended to Puerto Rico, where Spanish is inseparable from the history, culture, and identity of its people. More broadly,

⁴ Library of Congress, English Language Influence, in *Yo Soy (I Am): The Historical Trajectory of Language in Puerto Rico*, https://guides.loc.gov/language-in-puerto-rico/english-language?utm_

⁵ Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs, 91 Fed. Reg. 51,248, 51,321 (proposed Aug. 7, 2026) (to be codified at 45 C.F.R. § 1301.17(d)).

we question why Head Start programs serving multilingual communities across the United States should face restrictions on their ability to provide developmentally appropriate instruction in children's home languages — particularly when more than 230,000 children enrolled in Head Start speak a language other than English at home.⁶

We recognize the importance of English proficiency and the opportunities it provides. However, supporting English acquisition and preserving children's home languages are not mutually exclusive goals. Head Start programs should be empowered to pursue both, rather than being forced to choose between them.

Moreover, Puerto Rico's circumstances warrant particular consideration. Unlike immigrant communities that bring their languages and traditions to the United States, Puerto Rico came under U.S. sovereignty following the Spanish-American War. Its residents should not be subjected to federal educational policies that disregard their linguistic heritage or revive historical efforts to impose cultural assimilation. We therefore urge your Administration to:

1. Withdraw the proposed English-only instructional requirement and preserve the ability of Head Start programs nationwide to provide bilingual and multilingual education appropriate to the children and families they serve.
2. Explicitly protect Puerto Rico's ability to provide Head Start instruction in Spanish, recognizing the island's unique historical circumstances and the central role of Spanish in its educational system and cultural identity. Should the Administration proceed with the proposed requirement, Puerto Rico must receive clear and durable protections against English-only instructional mandates.
3. Preserve the instructional flexibility for Head Start programs serving immigrant and multilingual families in Illinois and throughout the United States, ensuring that children can develop English proficiency while continuing to learn in and maintain their home languages.

Head Start was established to expand opportunities for children and strengthen families, not to determine which languages and cultures deserve recognition. Imposing an English-only instructional requirement would undermine that mission, bring back old barriers to equal opportunities, and create new cultural and educational challenges.

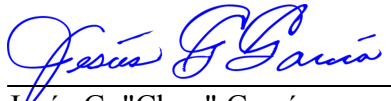
Children of Chicago, Illinois' agricultural communities, Puerto Rico, and across the nation deserve access to high-quality early childhood education that respects their families, identities, and future.

⁶ Salomon, Gisela. "This Head Start center teaches in two languages. A Trump overhaul would require one: English." September 30, 2026. Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/head-start-preschool-english-spanish-trump-f22fd386528dad6aa2d1b12f0c787fc6>.

Learning English should open doors for children. It should never require them to abandon the language and culture that shape who they are.

We urge your Administration to withdraw this proposal and uphold Head Start's longstanding commitment to serving all children and families.

Sincerely,



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress