



Woonsocket Head Start  
Child Development Association, Inc.

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Chair Hanna Gallo  
Senate Education Committee  
Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

May 6, 2026

**RE: In support of S 3077, to support Head Start and RI Pre-K**

Dear Chairperson and Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express strong support for this legislation to expand access to voluntary, free, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs for three- and four-year-old children, including those served through Rhode Island's state pre-kindergarten model and the federal Head Start program.

As a Head Start leader serving children and families in 5 high quality Centers in Woonsocket, I see every day the transformative impact that high-quality early childhood education has—not only on school readiness, but on long-term outcomes for children, families, and communities. Head Start programs are among the most effective two-generational investments we can make, supporting both early learning and family stability.

Designating Head Start and pre-kindergarten programs as categorically eligible for early childhood funding is a critical step forward. This approach recognizes the proven effectiveness, accountability, and comprehensive nature of these programs. Head Start, in particular, operates under rigorous federal standards, provides health, nutrition, and family support services, and is deeply embedded in the communities it serves.

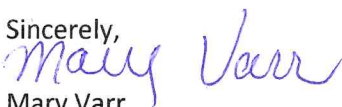
This legislation also appropriately emphasizes collaboration between the Department of Education, the Department of Human Services' Child Care Office, and the Head Start Collaboration Office. Aligning these systems is essential to building a coordinated, efficient early childhood infrastructure that maximizes resources and minimizes duplication, while ensuring families have access to the services they need.

At a time when early childhood providers are facing rising costs, workforce challenges, and increasing demand, predictable and equitable funding streams are more important than ever. Categorical eligibility will help stabilize programs like ours, allowing us to focus on what matters most—delivering high-quality services to Rhode Island's youngest learners and their families.

In Woonsocket our program serves 330 children and their families; 164 Head Start/Early Head Start, 124 Pre-K and 42 childcare. For many of them, Head Start is not just early education—it is a lifeline that connects them to critical supports and sets their children on a path toward lifelong success.

I urge you to support this important legislation and continue Rhode Island's commitment to investing in high-quality early childhood education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
  
Mary Varr  
Executive Director  
WHSCDA