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Protecting Head Start's Promise

A 3.2% COLA for Head Start

A 3.2% Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) is necessary to ensure Head Start programs—especially those serving American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) communities—can keep up with rising costs, retain qualified staff, and provide stable, high-quality early childhood education.

Inflation Is Still Eroding Budgets:

The most recent U.S. inflation rate (CPI-U) is **2.7%**, with core inflation at **2.9%**. Economic forecasts suggest inflation could rise further due to tariff pressures. A 3.2% COLA provides a modest but critical buffer to ensure Head Start staff don't fall behind in real wages as living costs rise.

AIAN Teacher Wage Gap:

On average, AIAN Head Start teachers earn 42% less than public school teachers in their state. This disparity makes it extraordinarily difficult to recruit and retain early educators in tribal communities—where staffing shortages already disrupt services.

Staffing and Service Stability at Risk:

Without a COLA that matches or slightly exceeds inflation, programs are forced to cut hours, reduce enrollment, or operate classrooms without qualified teachers—directly impacting children and families.

Fulfilling Federal Trust Responsibility:

The federal government has a legal and moral obligation to support the education of AIAN children. That responsibility must extend to ensuring competitive, equitable compensation for those who educate and care for them.

Safeguarding Program Quality:

Underfunded staff positions weaken Head Start's ability to meet national performance standards and deliver on its promise of school readiness. A 3.2% COLA is a direct investment in program quality and workforce stability.