MASSACHUSETTS
HEAD START ASSOCIATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 30, 2026
CONTACT: Michelle Haimowitz, mhaimowitz@massheadstart.org

Massachusetts Head Start Association Publicly Responds to Federal Attack on Head Start
Trump Administration Proposal Would Dismantle Head Start Standards

BOSTON, MA – Today, the Massachusetts Head Start Association submitted Public Comments opposing the federal proposal to eliminate over 90% of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, the foundational regulations for Head Start. This proposal would weaken the proven program with decades of evidence showing improved outcomes for vulnerable children and families and make it harder for local programs to provide the high-quality services children and families deserve.

For more than 60 years, Head Start has supported children and families by pairing early education with health care, developmental screenings, mental health supports, nutrition, family supports, and services for children with disabilities. Massachusetts' 28 Head Start programs provide the highest-quality early education and comprehensive services for more than 10,000 children birth-five from vulnerable families across the Commonwealth.

On August 7, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to dismantle Head Start regulations and threaten the quality, scope, and services of Head Start. The proposed rule eliminates quality early learning standards; removes standards for critical wraparound services for children and families including health and mental health services; reduces access and eligibility for children from families experiencing homelessness, children with disabilities, and foster children; and threatens learning outcomes for dual language learners.

Rather than addressing the real challenges facing Head Start, including rising operating costs, workforce shortages, and years of inadequate funding, the proposal punishes programs, families, and young children. It hands programs fewer resources and fewer protections at the same time, and it removes many of the evidence-based standards that have justified federal investment in Head Start for generations.

"The rule proposed by HHS would fundamentally upend those standards that enable generational benefits and would make it harder for our programs to deliver the high-quality services children and families deserve," says Michelle Haimowitz, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Head Start Association. "The harm of the proposed rule does not come from any one of the proposed

changes alone, it comes from the compounding impact of removing services and protections for the most vulnerable children and families. Children learn best when their health and mental health are sound, when their teachers are consistent and qualified, when their unique needs are identified early, and when their families have the resources and tools they need to thrive. The Head Start Act requires the Secretary to ensure that revisions to the standards will not reduce quality, scope, or services provided by Head Start. This rule would reduce the quality, scope, and services provided by Head Start. It would threaten a child and a family's overall wellbeing and experience in Head Start. For these reasons, we are submitting public comments today opposing the proposed rule and urging the Administration to withdraw the proposal."

With the infrastructure of Head Start's existing high-quality standards, the data is clear. Research consistently shows that children who participate in Head Start's quality programming enter kindergarten better prepared; show gains in literacy, math, and social-emotional skills; and benefit for years to come through higher educational attainment, better health, and greater economic stability.

The Massachusetts Head Start Association is grateful for the support and championship of the Healey-Driscoll Administration, the State Legislature, and the Massachusetts Congressional delegation in opposing the proposal.

"Head Start works," says Michelle Haimowitz. "We must not undermine its quality and outcomes by gutting its regulatory framework. We urge others to join us in submitting public comments opposing the rule by the deadline of October 6."

# # #

About the Massachusetts Head Start Association: The Massachusetts Head Start Association serves as the voice of Head Start in Massachusetts by providing collaborative learning opportunities, leveraging partnerships, and advocating for Head Start programs. For more information, visit massheadstart.org.