

Wilmington, Delaware  
July 2, 2026

**#0257**

**Sponsor:**

**Council  
Member  
Oliver**

**Co-Sponsors:**

**Council  
Member  
Owens**

**WHEREAS**, high-quality early childhood education is a cornerstone of educational equity, economic mobility, workforce development, and community well-being in the City of Wilmington. Head Start remains one of the most important educational investments for children from low-income families, providing school readiness, health screenings, nutritional support, family engagement services, and connections to social services. The American Academy of Pediatrics has reported that participation in early childhood education programs is associated with measurable improvements in school readiness and academic achievement, helping children enter kindergarten better prepared to succeed; and

**WHEREAS** Wilmington Head Start Inc. has provided comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, family support services to Wilmington children, and employment for City residents since 1984. Its programming has historically operated under a federal Head Start grant administered through the United States Department of Health and Human Services, and the relinquishment of this critical funding places critical early childhood services in a period of uncertain transition; and

**WHEREAS**, according to federal and state early childhood education data, more than 1,000 Delaware preschool children are enrolled annually in federally funded Head Start programs, while additional infants and toddlers receive services through Early Head Start programs and partnerships. The loss or disruption of Head Start capacity in Wilmington would disproportionately affect families already facing economic hardship and would undermine efforts to improve kindergarten readiness, educational achievement, and long-term economic mobility. Studies of nationally recognized early childhood education programs have estimated

annual social rates of return ranging from approximately seven to ten percent, making early childhood education among the most effective public investments available to government; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Wilmington is contending with a persistent achievement gap between youth residing locally and their counterparts throughout the State. The loss or disruption of Wilmington Head Start Inc. and other early education providers would undermine those efforts, resulting in a disproportionate impact on low-income families, working parents, foster children, children experiencing homelessness, and children requiring developmental and educational support services. Such closures would also constitute a substantial setback to improving kindergarten readiness, educational achievement, and long-term economic mobility in Delaware's most populous city; and

**WHEREAS**, families, educators, and community stakeholders deserve transparency regarding the circumstances surrounding the relinquishment of the federal grant, the transition plan for enrolled children and families, the disposition of federal funding, and the long-term future of Head Start services within the City of Wilmington; and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WILMINGTON** that the Council of the City of Wilmington respectfully requests that every effort be made to ensure uninterrupted services for all currently enrolled children and to preserve the availability of Head Start opportunities for future Wilmington families.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Council respectfully urges Delaware's congressional delegation, including the honorable United States Senators and Representative for the State of Delaware, to engage with the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the Administration for Children and Families to obtain a full accounting of the

circumstances surrounding the transition and to advocate for uninterrupted services for all enrolled children and families.

Passed by City Council,

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
City Clerk

**SYNOPSIS:** This Resolution expresses Wilmington City Council's concern regarding the relinquishment of the federal Head Start grant by Wilmington Head Start, Inc. and the potential impact on children, families, and employees. The Resolution recognizes the critical role Head Start plays in promoting school readiness, educational equity, and economic opportunity for low-income families, and urges every effort to ensure uninterrupted services for enrolled children. It further calls upon Delaware's Congressional Delegation to seek transparency regarding the grant transition and advocate for the continued availability of Head Start services for Wilmington families.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

This resolution has no direct fiscal cost to the City of Wilmington, as operations are funded entirely through a federal grant administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. However, the city faces a potentially large indirect economic cost stemming from systemic disruptions to early childhood infrastructure, a broader trend of structural contraction across the state's childcare industry and local enrollment, and the loss of stable employment for city residents. Public tax documents show that Wilmington Head Start Inc. historically managed an annual operating budget ranging between \$4.85 million and \$5.10 million across three local branches, which was part of a broader network supporting 1,480 funded preschool seats statewide, which represents approximately 20% of eligible Delaware preschoolers.

While a federally assigned interim operator will take over Wilmington's locations on July 1, 2026, to prevent an immediate interruption in care, long-term staff stability and service levels remain highly uncertain. Potential indirect municipal costs include compressed local earned tax revenues if working parents are forced to truncate hours or exit the workforce due to scheduling or licensing gaps. Additionally, any permanent drop in municipal childcare capacity threatens to worsen Wilmington's persistent academic achievement gap. Downstream remedial education interventions are far more capital-intensive than early childhood operational stabilization, given that high-quality early childhood investments historically yield an annual social rate of return ranging from seven to ten percent.