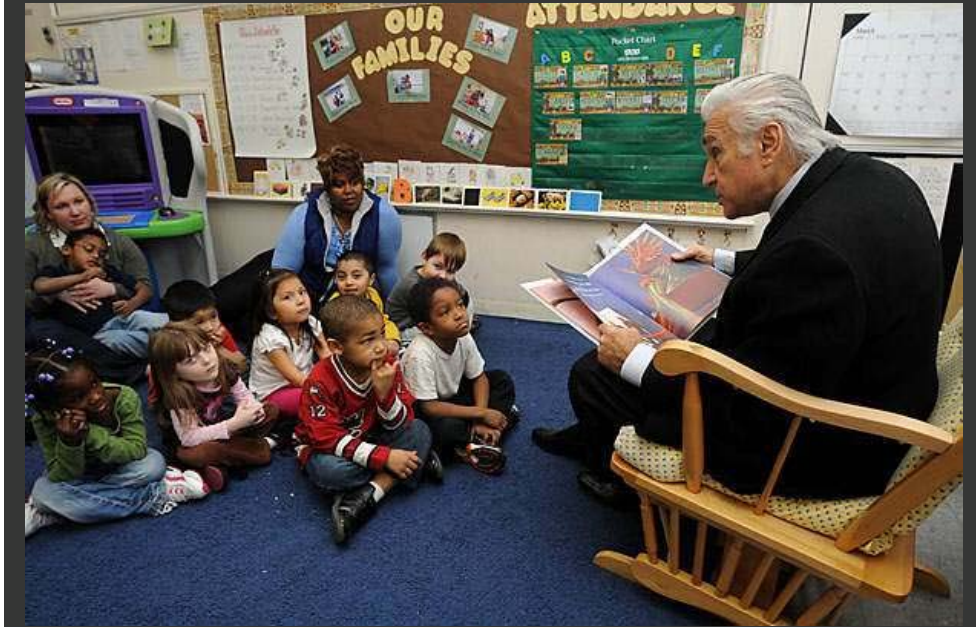


Rep. Hinchey speaks out against proposed Head Start cuts

Congressman says plan would force 1 in 7 kids out

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Written by
[Emily Stewart](#)

In a brightly decorated classroom, U.S. Rep. Maurice Hinchey read a picture book about dinosaurs to a group of 11 preschool-age children.

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The students, enrolled in Head Start, a federally funded early childhood development program for low-income families, appeared to listen eagerly as the congressman read "How Do Dinosaurs Get Well Soon?"



U.S. Rep. Maurice Hinchey reads "How Do Dinosaurs Get Well Soon?" to children in Pauline Taylor's class Monday in Astor Children's Services Head Start Program in the City of Poughkeepsie. / Lee Ferris/Poughkeepsie Journal

But after reading the book, Hinchey said a proposed \$1.1 billion federal cut to the Head Start program nationwide would mean one in seven children at the Astor Children's Services Head Start Program in the City of Poughkeepsie — and across the county — would be forced out of the program.

Hinchey, D-Hurley, said the cut, proposed by Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives, would take away \$1 million from the Head Start program in Dutchess County, where at least 100 children would be forced out of their Head Start classroom and about 25 educators would be discharged.

About 700 students are enrolled in Head Start at seven locations across Dutchess County, said Mary Sontheimer, assistant executive director for early childhood programs at Astor Services.

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Hinchey said the cuts were initially proposed as part of a Republican spending bill, H.R. 1, designed to fund the government for the remainder of the fiscal year.

The bill passed the House, but was rejected by the U.S. Senate.

A new spending bill must be signed into law by Friday to avoid a government shutdown, he said in a written release Monday.

A variety of cuts have been proposed in the House and Senate to reduce the nation's more than \$1 trillion deficit.

Outside the classroom, standing behind a lectern at the end of a long hall, filled with students, teachers and staff at Astor, Hinchey spoke more about the implications of the proposed cut.

"Without Head Start, millions of children would enter kindergarten without basic educational and developmental skills," he said.

Hinchey said those who participated in Head Start as children are more likely to be employed and less likely to be incarcerated as adults.

"Education is one of the best investments we can make," he said.

Nationwide, the cut would remove about 218,000 children from Head Start, he said. "Not only does it help the kids, but it has a ripple effect," said Liz Downs, a Webatuck resident whose two grandchildren went through Head Start.

Downs, who was at the news conference Monday, said the thing she was most impressed with was the empathy and self-confidence they learned.

The Head Start program began in 1965 and has since served more than 27 million children, according to the program's national website.

For more information, visit: www.nhsa.org.

Reach Emily Stewart at estewart@poughkeepsiejournal.com or 845-437-4882.