

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 5299

To amend the Head Start Act to establish Tribal certification standards for Indian Head Start programs, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

AUGUST 6, 2026

Mr. HEINRICH (for himself and Mr. ARMSTRONG) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs

A BILL

To amend the Head Start Act to establish Tribal certification standards for Indian Head Start programs, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Native Language Edu-
5 cators in Classrooms Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. EXCLUSION FROM NATIONWIDE HEAD START**
7 **TEACHER CREDENTIALING CALCULATION.**

8 Section 648A(a)(2) of the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C.
9 9843a(a)(2)) is amended—

1 (1) in subparagraph (A), by inserting “(other
2 than Indian Head Start programs)” after “center-
3 based programs”; and

4 (2) in subparagraph (B)—

5 (A) in clause (i), by inserting “(other than
6 Indian Head Start programs)” after “center-
7 based programs”; and

8 (B) in clause (ii), by inserting “(other than
9 Indian Head Start programs)” after “center-
10 based programs”.

11 **SEC. 3. STAFF QUALIFICATIONS FOR INDIAN HEAD START**
12 **PROGRAMS.**

13 Section 648A(a)(2) of the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C.
14 9843a(a)(2)) is amended—

15 (1) by redesignating subparagraphs (C) and
16 (D) as subparagraphs (D) and (E), respectively;

17 (2) by inserting after subparagraph (B) the fol-
18 lowing:

19 “(C) DEGREE REQUIREMENTS APPLICABLE
20 TO INDIAN HEAD START PROGRAMS.—

21 “(i) MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS.—In
22 order to help fulfill the objectives of Head
23 Start programs for Indian (including Alas-
24 ka Native) children and families, notwith-
25 standing subparagraph (A) or (B), or any

other provision of this subchapter, the Secretary shall ensure that all Indian Head Start teachers and teaching assistants in center-based programs either—

“(I) possess at the time of hire—

“(aa) at least a child development associate credential;

“(bb) an early childhood education certificate from an institution of higher education (as defined by section 101 or 102 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001, 1002)), including a Tribal college or university; or

“(cc) an early childhood education certificate issued by a State government entity, as long as the requirements for attaining that certificate meet or exceed the requirements to obtain a child development associate credential; or

“(II) provide, at the time of hire, proof of enrollment in an education

1 program that will, upon completion,
2 result in the receipt of—

3 “(aa) at least a child devel-
4 opment associate credential;

5 “(bb) an early childhood
6 education certificate from an in-
7 stitution of higher education (as
8 defined by section 101 or 102 of
9 the Higher Education Act of
10 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001, 1002)),
11 including a Tribal college or uni-
12 versity; or

13 “(cc) an early childhood
14 education certificate issued by a
15 State government entity, as long
16 as the requirements for attaining
17 that certificate meet or exceed
18 the requirements to obtain a
19 child development associate cre-
20 dential.

21 “(ii) REQUIREMENTS FOR DEGREE
22 COMPLETION.—The Secretary shall ensure
23 that Indian Head Start teachers and
24 teaching assistants who meet the require-
25 ments of clause (i)(II) complete the edu-

1 cation program and earn such credential or
 2 certificate not later than 2 years after the
 3 date of hire by the Indian Head Start pro-
 4 gram.”; and

5 (3) in clause (i) of subparagraph (D), as so re-
 6 designated—

7 (A) in subclause (I), in the matter pre-
 8 ceding item (aa), by inserting “except with re-
 9 spect to Indian Head Start programs” after
 10 “Head Start agencies”; and

11 (B) in subclause (III), by striking “sub-
 12 paragraph (A) or (B)” and inserting “subpara-
 13 graph (A), (B), or (C)”.

14 **SEC. 4. STAFF QUALIFICATIONS FOR INDIAN EARLY HEAD**
 15 **START PROGRAMS.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 645A(h) of the Head
 17 Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9840a(h)) is amended to read as
 18 follows:

19 “(h) CENTER-BASED STAFF.—The Secretary shall—

20 “(1) ensure that all teachers providing direct
 21 services to children and families participating in
 22 Early Head Start programs located in Early Head
 23 Start centers, with the exception of Indian Early
 24 Head Start programs located in Indian Early Head
 25 Start centers subject to paragraph (2), have a min-

imum of a child development associate credential,
and have been trained (or have equivalent
coursework) in early childhood development; and

“(2) ensure that all teachers providing direct
services to children and families participating in In-
dian Early Head Start programs located in Indian
Early Head Start centers—

“(A) possess at the time of hire—

“(i) at least a child development asso-
ciate credential;

“(ii) an early childhood education cer-
tificate from an institution of higher edu-
cation (as defined by section 101 or 102 of
the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20
U.S.C. 1001, 1002)), including a Tribal
college or university; or

“(iii) an early childhood education
certificate issued by a State government
entity, as long as the requirements for at-
taining that certificate meet or exceed the
requirements to obtain a child development
associate credential; or

“(B) provide, at the time of hire, proof of
enrollment in an education program that will,
upon completion, result in the receipt of—

1 “(i) at least a child development asso-
2 ciate credential;

3 “(ii) an early childhood education cer-
4 tificate from an institution of higher edu-
5 cation (as defined by section 101 or 102 of
6 the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20
7 U.S.C. 1001, 1002)), including a Tribal
8 college or university; or

9 “(iii) an early childhood education
10 certificate issued by a State government
11 entity, as long as the requirements for at-
12 taining that certificate meet or exceed the
13 requirements to obtain a child development
14 associate credential.”.

15 (b) DEFINITIONS.—Section 637 of the Head Start
16 Act (42 U.S.C. 9832) is amended—

17 (1) by redesignating paragraphs (10) through
18 (26) as paragraphs (11) through (27), respectively;
19 and

20 (2) by inserting after paragraph (9) the fol-
21 lowing:

22 “(10) INDIAN EARLY HEAD START PROGRAM.—
23 The term ‘Indian Early Head Start program’ means
24 an Early Head Start program served through an In-

- 1 dian tribe (including a consortium of such tribes or
- 2 an alternative agency) or Tribal organization.”.

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