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[00:00:24] **Speaker 1** Head Start programs that help prepare young children from low-income families for school serve more than 700,000 households across the country and 16,000 children here in Wisconsin. But Head Start, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, could be eliminated by federal cuts. The regional office that serves Wisconsin was already closed. The Head Start program that serves four counties in western Wisconsin is anxiously awaiting the other shoe to drop. Joining us is Tangbui Duquette, Director of Head Start for the Western Dairyland Community Action Agency. And thanks very much for being here. Thank you so much for having me. What do you know about continued funding for your Head Start Program and have you already seen cuts to your program?

[00:01:15] **Speaker 2** At this time we haven't seen any cut yet. We are expected to, we, our program is entering our fiscal 2025 budget May 1st. So at this time, we are expected to be fully funded for our fiscal 2025 program. However, beyond that, it's uncertain right now.

[00:01:38] **Speaker 1** Because how many children do you serve?

[00:01:43] **Speaker 2** So we are currently serving a total of 442 children. We are in four counties in Western Wisconsin. So we're in Buffalo, Jackson, Trumbullo, and Eau Claire counties in nine different centers. And out of the nine centers, only three of them are in urban areas. And then the remaining six centers are in... Rural communities and many of them we are the only licensed providers in that community.

[00:02:16] **Speaker 1** Were you surprised to learn of the possible elimination of the program?

[00:02:23] **Speaker 2** Absolutely, I was surprised. I was devastated to hear that that is the, that is part of the proposal in the president budget.

[00:02:35] **Speaker 1** What would that mean for the children and families that you and other Head Start programs serve?

[00:02:43] **Speaker 2** Honestly, the impact is clear. It will be devastating for every community across Wisconsin and frankly, our country. Hundreds of thousands of children will not have access to a safe and nurturing environments. Our parents, our families will have no one to care for them. They cannot go to work. And that will really create a major label disruption. You know, when you think about it, it's already in a market where employers already are struggling to find workers. And ultimately this will hurt rural communities the most. You know that I am in this community. I see the struggles that they face every day, scarce resources. There's very few employment opportunity and it will put more children and families into poverty. And in the long run, it will end up costing taxpayer even more money.

[00:03:39] **Speaker 1** Recent survey results of child care providers across the state say one in four could close their doors with the end of the child care counts program. How devastating would kind of both these things be?

[00:03:56] **Speaker 2** Honestly, it will be an economic disaster because Head Start is an important pillar of the child care infrastructure. So Head Start and Child Care works together as two entities that support working families. And so in addition to the potential of Head Start losing its funding and losing access to child care account for child care providers. I would say the majority of the Wisconsin workforce wouldn't have no place to send their children to and then they can't go to work. And so that would be an economic disaster.

[00:04:34] **Speaker 1** Apart from the economics of it, how successful is Head Start in helping young children with early learning?

[00:04:44] **Speaker 2** I think there's a reason why we have had 60 years of bipartisan support, right? Because it works. You know, there have been research done that have shown children from low-income families who have gone through Head Start are more likely to graduate high school, are more to go further with their education to secondary education, and are less likely to end up into the criminal justice system. When you think about the first five years of life, those are the most important part of any children's brain development. And Head Start provide that stability and the support for the children and the families. And for our program, 96% of the children that we serve are either homeless, they are in foster care, they are living below federal poverty, or they are receiving public assistance. These are families that will not be able to have access to the support, nutrition, health services that we provide. And we have proven success about families who've gone through Head Start are more likely to be out of poverty and less likely to rely on public assistance in the long run and are a saving to the economy.

[00:06:11] **Speaker 1** Well, we need to leave it there but we will be watching this and thank you for your important work. Thank you so much for having me. For more on this and other issues facing Wisconsin, visit our website at pbswisconsin.org and then click on the news tab. That's our program for tonight. I'm Frederica Freiberg. Have a good weekend.

[00:06:55] **Speaker 3** Thank you. Cut funding for such a vital program.

[00:07:48] **Speaker 1** I would agree. It's a great program and I love it.