



## Welcome to the 2026 National AgFamilies Head Start Association Public Policy Forum

### *A letter from the Board of Directors President*

*Dear Attendees, Advocates, Families, and Colleagues,*

Warm greetings and welcome to the 2026 National AgFamilies Head Start Association Policy Forum. It is an honor to gather with each of you in our nation's capital, united by a shared purpose: advocating for children, families, and communities served by Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs across the country.

The Policy Forum is more than an annual event—it is a powerful reminder that our voices matter. It is a space where parents, staff, directors, community leaders, and advocates come together to learn, connect, and strengthen our collective commitment to equity, opportunity, and justice for all families. During our time together, we will engage in important conversations about early childhood education, family well-being, and workforce realities impacting farmworker communities, federal policy, and the future of Head Start.

Head Start has always been rooted in resilience, compassion, and hope. For decades, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs have stood strong through challenges, transitions, and uncertainty. We have adapted, innovated, and persevered because our children and families deserve nothing less. Our work is not simply a program—it is a promise to families that they will be seen, heard, valued, and supported.

One of the most important aspects of this forum is our visits to Capitol Hill. These visits are not ceremonial—they are essential. Every conversation with elected officials is an opportunity to elevate the lived experiences of the families we serve and to advocate for continued investment in programs that change lives. Legislators need to hear directly from those who understand the realities, strengths, and needs of migrant and seasonal communities. Your stories, your leadership, and your advocacy are powerful tools for change. When we speak together with purpose and unity, we make an impact.

As Board President, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to our Executive Director, Cleo Rodriguez, Jr., and our Deputy Director, Janna Rios, for their steadfast leadership and dedication to the association and the families we serve. I also want to recognize the incredible AgFamilies staff whose hard work, commitment, and countless hours behind the scenes made this forum possible. Their passion and perseverance continue to drive this work forward every day, and we are deeply grateful.

I would also like to offer a special acknowledgment to our parents and families who have traveled from near and far to be here. Many of you have left your homes, jobs, children, and daily responsibilities to join us in Washington, D.C. Your presence here is powerful and meaningful. The heart of Head Start has always been families, and your voices remain at the center of this movement. Thank you for your courage, sacrifice, and commitment to advocacy.

This year, we also pause to honor the memory of our beloved colleague and advocate, Alison Feighan. Alison's passion for children, innovation, and education touched countless lives across our Head Start community. She believed deeply in the brilliance and potential of every child and inspired many through her leadership, kindness, and dedication.

As families and communities, we understand that life is full of seasons of endings and beginnings. While we grieve the loss of those who helped shape our path, we also carry forward their vision, their love, and their purpose. Alison's legacy reminds us that every ending can plant the seeds of new growth, renewed hope, and continued impact. We honor her not only in memory but in the work we continue together on behalf of children and families.

Thank you for being here, for lending your voice, and for standing united in advocacy and service. We invite you to connect, learn, and engage fully during this forum. The National AgFamilies Head Start Association values your participation, your leadership, and your unwavering commitment to our communities.

Together, we continue the work. Together, we continue the legacy. Together, we make a difference.  
With gratitude and solidarity,

*Karelia Harding*

**2026 NAFHSA Board President**