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****FACT SHEET INCLUDED****

KENNEDY INTRODUCES THE HEAD START FOR SCHOOL READINESS ACT OF 2007

Mr. President, it is a privilege to join Senators Enzi, Dodd, and Alexander in introducing the Head Start for School Readiness Act. Our goal is to reauthorize Head Start and continue our bipartisan support for this very successful program to prepare low-income children for school.

For over forty years, Head Start has given disadvantaged children the assistance they need to arrive at school ready to learn. Its comprehensive services guarantee balanced meals for children, and a well-defined curriculum to see that children develop early skills in reading, writing, and math, and positive social skills as well. It provides visits to doctors and dentists, and outreach to parents to encourage them to participate actively in their child's early development.

It is clear that Head Start works. A federal evaluation found that Head Start children make gains during the program itself, and the gains continue when the children enter kindergarten. Once Head Start children complete their kindergarten year, they are near the national average of 100 in key areas, with scores of 93 in vocabulary, 96 in early writing, and 92 in early math.

We've made tremendous, bipartisan progress this year in our effort to reauthorize Head Start and build upon a program that serves as a lifeline for the neediest families and children across the nation.

In this legislation, we build on Head Start's proven track record and expand it to include thousands of low-income children who are not yet served by the program. We provide for better coordination of Head Start with state programs for low-income children. We strengthen Head Start's focus on school readiness and early literacy. We enhance the educational goals for Head Start teachers. And we provide greater accountability for the program, including new policies to ensure improved monitoring visits and new policies to address programs with serious deficiencies.

To strengthen Head Start, we have to begin by providing more resources for it. The need for Head Start is greater than ever. Child poverty is on the rise again. Today, less than 50 percent of children eligible for Head Start participate in the program. Hundreds of thousands of three- and four-year-olds are left out because of the inadequate funding level of the program. Early Head Start serves only 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers. It is shameful that 97 percent of the children eligible for Early Head Start have no access to it. It's long past time for Congress to expand access to Head Start to serve as many infants, toddlers, and preschool children as possible.

The bill that we introduce today will set a goal to expand Head Start over the next several years. We call for increases in funding, from \$6.9 billion in the current fiscal year, to \$7.3 billion in FY 2008, \$7.5 billion in FY 2009, and \$7.9 billion in 2010. These funding levels are critical to advance the essential reforms in this legislation, and to serve thousands of additional children in the Head Start program.

Early Head Start is an especially important program for needy infants and toddlers. Research clearly shows its benefit to infants and toddlers and their families. Early Head Start children have larger vocabularies, lower levels of aggressive behavior, and higher levels of sustained attention than children not enrolled in the program. Parents are more likely to play with their children and read to them.

This bill will double the size of Early Head Start over the course of this authorization, and deliver services to over 56,000 additional children over the course of this authorization.

Our bill establishes a Head Start Collaboration Office in every state to maximize services to Head Start children, to align Head Start with kindergarten classrooms, and to strengthen its local partnerships with other agencies. These offices will work hand in hand with the Head Start network of training and technical assistance to support Head Start grantees in better meeting the goals of preparing children for school.

States will also have an active role in coordinating their system of early childhood programs, and increasing the quality of those programs. Our bill designates an Early Care and Education Council in each state to conduct an inventory of children's needs, develop plans for data collection and for supporting early childhood educators, review and upgrade early learning standards, and make recommendations on technical assistance and training. For those states ready to move forward and implement their statewide plan, our bill will offer a one-time incentive grant to implement these important efforts.

Over the past four decades, Head Start has built up quality and performance standards to guarantee a full range of services, so that children are educated in the basics about letters and numbers and books, and are also healthy, well-fed, and supported in stable and nurturing relationships. Head Start is a model program, and we can enhance its quality even more.

One way to do that is to strengthen Head Start's current literacy initiative. We know the key to later reading success is to get young children excited about letters and books and numbers. Our bill emphasizes language and literacy, by enhancing the literacy training required of Head Start teachers, by continuing to promote parent literacy, and by working to put more books into Head Start classrooms and into children's homes.

We also make a commitment in this bill to upgrade all of the educational components of Head Start, and ensure that services are aligned with expectations for children's kindergarten year and continue to be driven by the effective Head Start Child Outcomes Framework.

At the heart of Head Start's success are its teachers and staff. They are caring, committed persons who know the children they serve and are dedicated to improving their lives. They help children learn to identify letters of the alphabet and arrange the pieces of puzzles. They teach them to brush their teeth, wash their hands, make friends and follow rules. Yet their salary is still half the salary of kindergarten teachers, and turnover is high -- 11 percent a year.

Because a teacher's quality is directly related to a child's outcome, our bill establishes a goal to ensure that every Head Start teacher have their A.A. degree and 50 percent earn their B.A. degree over the course of this authorization. Head Start teachers and staff are the greatest resource to children and families in the program, and we must match these ambitious reforms and improvements with the funding needed to see that Head Start programs can meet these goals.

We've also granted additional flexibility in this bill for Head Start programs to serve families and children that need services at the local level. We've lifted the eligibility requirements so that families living below 130 percent of the federal poverty rate can qualify and participate in Head Start. Often, these are the neighbors of Head Start children with similar needs, but currently remain barred from participating in the program.

Under this bill, Head Start programs will be empowered with greater authority to determine the needs of families in their local communities and define services to meet those needs. If programs determine that there's a greater share of infants and toddlers in need of services, our bill allows them to apply to

the Secretary to convert and expand Head Start to serve those youngest children, consistent with Early Head Start standards. If programs identify a need to provide full-day or full-year care for children and families, they can take steps to do so.

Accountability is a cornerstone of excellence in education and should start early. Head Start should be accountable for its promise to provide safe and healthy learning environments, to support each child's individual pattern of development and learning, to cement community partnerships in services for children, and to involve parents in their child's growth.

Head Start reviews are already among the most extensive in the field. Every 3 years, a federal and local team spends a week thoroughly examining every aspect of every Head Start program. They check everything from batteries in flashlights to how parents feel about the program. Our bill takes a further step to improve the monitoring of Head Start programs, ensures that programs receive useful and timely feedback and information, and strengthens annual reviews and plans for improvement.

Our bill also takes an important step to suspend the Head Start National Reporting System. Four years ago, I insisted that instead of rushing forward with a national assessment for every four- and five-year-old in Head Start, this Administration should instead move more deliberately to develop and implement an assessment tool that would help guide and improve Head Start programs. Unfortunately, they rejected that call and proceeded with an assessment – absent sufficient authorization or oversight from Congress – that was later proven by a GAO study to be flawed and inconsistent with professional standards for testing and measurement.

Any assessment used in Head Start must be held to the highest standard. It must be valid and reliable, fair to children from all backgrounds, balanced in what it measures, and address the development of the whole child. Our bill calls on the National Academy of Sciences to continue their work in surveying assessments and outcomes appropriate for early childhood programs, and to make recommendations to the Secretary and to Congress on the use of assessments and outcomes in Head Start programs. I hope the National Academy's work will be helpful as we consider future improvements in the Head Start program.

Finally, this bill appropriately rejects earlier calls to block grant Head Start services, preserving the community-based structure of the program. It makes no sense to turn Head Start into a block grant to the states. To do so would have dismantled the program and undermined Head Start's guarantees that children can see doctors and dentists, eat nutritious meals, and learn early academic and social skills. The current federal-to-local structure of Head Start enables it to tailor its services to meet local community needs. Performance standards guarantee a high level of quality across all programs. Yet each program is unique and specifically adapted to the local community. Head Start is successful in serving Inuit children in Alaska, migrant-workers' children in Tennessee, and inner-city children in Boston. It is essential to maintain the ability of local Head Start programs to tailor their services to meet the needs of local neighborhoods and their children.

The Head Start for School Readiness Act we are introducing today will keep Head Start on its successful path, and enable this vital program to continue to thrive and improve. I urge our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join us in advancing and strengthening this program, and give children the head start they need and deserve to prepare for school and for life.

Head Start for School Readiness Act
Key Policy Highlights

Expanded Access

- Expands eligibility to Head Start programs for additional low-income children and families (up to 130% of the federal poverty guideline).
- Doubles the Early Head Start set-aside (currently 10%; would phase up to 20% over 5 years).
- Ensures funds for Indian Head Start (4% minimum set-aside) and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (5% minimum set-aside).
- Increases overall authorization of program (\$7.3 billion in FY08; \$7.6 billion in FY09; \$7.9 billion in FY10).

Focus on School Readiness

- Supports Head Start programs in aligning standards and services with state early learning standards.
- Suspends and terminates the flawed Head Start National Reporting System (assessment).
- Requires the Secretary to implement new standards and assessments based on gold-standard research (National Academy of Sciences).
- Strengthens transition of Head Start children to school.

Strengthened Workforce

- Dedicates 1% of total Head Start funds to Head Start grantees, for local training and technical assistance efforts.
- Establishes new goals (no requirements or penalties) for the Head Start teaching workforce:
 - All Head Start teachers nationwide must have an Associate's degree in 5 years;
 - Half of all teachers in each state must have a Bachelor's degree in 6 years;
 - All Head Start curriculum specialists must have at least a Bachelor's degree in 5 years; and
 - All Head Start assistant teachers must have at least a child development associate credential in 5 years.
- Guarantees training and creates a career ladder for every Head Start employee.
- Provides on-going literacy training for Head Start teachers to promote the development of children's pre-reading skills.

Expanded State Role

- - Creates a new State Advisory Council on Early Care and Education in every state. Activities include an inventory of children's needs, plan for statewide professional development for the early childhood education workforce, review of state early learning standards, new areas for collaboration between early childhood programs, and a unified system of data collection.
 - Dedicates \$100 million from Head Start appropriations for new competitive incentive grant program to implement state early care and education plans.
 - Expands the State Head Start Collaboration Office to focus on assisting Head Start agencies in:
 - Developing partnerships at the local level;
 - Expanding services to children;
 - Coordinating training opportunities for Head Start staff; and
 - Aligning the program with state early learning standards.
 - Recognizes and awards bonuses to "Centers of Excellence" that provide exemplary services to Head Start children and families. (New authorization of \$90 million).

Greater Accountability

- - Improves monitoring, including unannounced site inspections, mandatory follow-up reviews of centers with deficiencies, and a review of child outcomes in monitoring.
 - Provides for the re-competition of deficient Head Start grants (those with demonstrated record of

non-compliance with Head Start's program standards).

- Creates a new policy for under-enrollment in programs: (1) standard definition for under-enrollment; (2) technical assistance and corrective action to under-enrolled grantees; and (3) recapturing, reducing or withholding funds associated with under-enrolled slots after 18 months of under-enrollment.
- Requires each Head Start agency to submit an annual audit of administrative expenses in programs to the Secretary.
- Caps the use of Head Start funds to compensate employees in excess of the salary of the Secretary of Health and Human Services (\$168,000).