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****KEY POLICY HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDED**

KENNEDY ON HEADSTART REAUTHORIZATION

Conferees Meet to discuss reauthorization bill

(As Prepared for Delivery)

I thank Chairman Miller for scheduling today's meeting of conferees on the Head Start reauthorization. I'm grateful to Senator Enzi and all the Members of our Senate Committee for the bipartisan effort we've made over the past two Congresses to strengthen and improve the current program. I'm pleased that we've finally reached a point in both Chambers of Congress, where we can provide a better lifeline of support for the neediest families and children across the nation.

For more than 40 years, Head Start has given disadvantaged children the assistance they need to arrive at school ready to learn, and the building blocks they need to succeed in school and later in life. Head Start teachers give young children the help they need to develop both their learning skills and their social skills. They also receive other services, such as doctor and dentist visits, immunizations against childhood diseases, and behavioral and mental health care. As we all know, Head Start has long been a model for community development and advancement. It empowers parents with the skills and resources needed to be full partners in the education of their children.

In this reauthorization, we build on many years of lessons learned to set an even better course for the program. This Conference Report maintains Head Start's quality services, promotes school readiness, and ensures greater accountability in programs. It provides better access to programs and services for children, communities, and families in need. It provides a blueprint for improving the Head Start workforce. It builds on the highly successful Early Head Start program, and it enables Head Start to better work with other child and family agencies in order to serve children and families more effectively.

Just as in elementary and secondary education, reform in early education requires resources, too. The bill increases the authorizations for Head Start to \$7.3 billion in fiscal year 2008, \$7.6 billion in fiscal year 2009, and \$7.9 billion in fiscal year 2010. The conferees have also emphasized the importance of providing needed funds to equip Head Start programs to respond to the evolving and changing needs in their local communities.

The Conference Report ensures accountability and quality services for Head Start children and their families by dedicating nearly \$2 million this year to Head Start agencies for local training and improving efforts.

We've also granted additional flexibility to Head Start programs to serve thousands of additional low-income children in need, by shifting eligibility to families just above the federal poverty level. It's essential that Head Start centers prioritize services to the neediest families in their communities. The new flexibility provides assistance to poor families who are neighbors of those currently enrolled in Head Start, as they transition to work and struggle to keep up with the higher cost of living in this new economy. A family of four in New England earning \$26,000 a year can surely benefit from Head Start, and I appreciate my colleagues' work to include this essential provision.

The Conference Report also makes a long overdue commitment to expanding Head Start programs for Native Americans, as well as for migrant and seasonal farmworkers. By reserving up to \$20 million annually to expand these services, we can hopefully reach an additional 5,500 children of farmworkers and an additional 5,100 Native American children living in poverty. New provisions are also included for homeless children, children who are English language learners, and children with disabilities, so that these young populations can receive the care and attention they need and deserve.

Head Start teachers and staff are the heart and future of the program. They help children learn to identify letters and arrange the pieces of puzzles. They teach them to brush their teeth, wash their hands, make friends, and follow rules.

This reauthorization establishes goals to help Head Start staff improve their knowledge and skills. We've committed to a goal that all Head Start teachers have their A.A. degree, and 50 percent earn their B.A., over the course of this authorization. We've worked to give Head Start agencies a dedicated stream of funds for needed training for teachers. We've committed to confronting the persistent challenge of compensating Head Start teachers as the professionals they are.

Head Start teachers currently earn only half of the salary of kindergarten teachers, and turnover is about 11 percent a year. The conference report commits 40 percent of new funds in Head Start to improving program quality and increasing teacher salaries, so that we can attract and retain more of these caring and committed leaders.

The Conference Report provides needed upgrades to the educational aspects of Head Start, to align the program's curricula and standards with what children need to know and be able to do when they enter kindergarten.

We encourage stronger partnerships between Head Start and local schools, although Head Start services will continue to be guided by the highly effective Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. We also do more to see that Head Start programs are a bridge for children to their local schools, to ease their transition from preschool to kindergarten.

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

For years, Head Start had had one of the most comprehensive monitoring systems in early childhood education. The Conference Report continues this effective monitoring, and establishes a new system for the designation of Head Start grants, to be phased in over the next several years. We know that the vast majority of Head Start programs provide outstanding services. But we must also take steps to address the small number of programs with serious deficiencies, so that substantial problems do not languish at the expense of children.

If a local program is unable to meet Head Start's stellar standards of quality, others should step in. This new system will facilitate those difficult decisions, and do so in a manner that is transparent, fair, and responsive to the local needs of families and children.

The Conference Report also expands Early Head Start. Since 1994 when it began, results have proven it one of the most effective programs operated by the Department of Health and Human Services. In this legislation, we improve the training and assistance network in Early Head Start, and guarantee a dedicated expert in each state to work with others to meet the needs of infants and toddlers.

We also expand the screening available to infants exposed to trauma, violence, or other circumstances detrimental to their development. And we commit to expanding Early Head Start to serve an additional 8,000 low-income infants and toddlers over the five-year course of the authorization.

Research shows that the first five years of life make an immense difference for a child. Those who attend high-quality early education programs are more likely to do well when they reach elementary school, are less likely to be held back a grade and more likely to graduate from high school and go on to college.

Quality early education pays off – we all are familiar with the studies that show that for every dollar invested in a high-quality early learning program, there is a 16 dollar return later in life.

The scope of services available to our youngest children is certainly evolving. Today, the majority of young children are enrolled in early education – 69 percent of all 4 year-olds in the states participate in child care, preschool, or Head Start. Over 60 percent of all young children are cared for by someone other than their parents.

Every child – regardless of background – deserves to learn and develop in a high-quality setting. We need to strengthen early childhood education to improve the quality of learning opportunities for young children, and help them learn and succeed.

A comprehensive curriculum and a stable and well-qualified workforce are the cornerstones of good early education. I'm especially pleased that the Conference Report includes the blueprint needed to strengthen the array of early childhood programs and services for young children.

It establishes an Early Childhood Education Advisory Council to examine needs across early childhood programs, develop a plan to improve professional development, upgrade standards, enhance collaboration among programs, and improve data collection. States ready to take on the challenge of implementing needed improvements will qualify for incentive grants – as funds permit – to get that work underway.

One of our highest priorities in Congress is to expand educational opportunities for every American. In this age of globalization, every citizen deserves a chance to acquire the skills to compete in the modern economy. Learning begins at birth and is accelerated in the early years – long before a child even begins kindergarten.

The Conference Report will help us achieve this essential goal. It keeps Head Start on its successful path, and enables it to continue to thrive and improve. I thank all of the conferees for their excellent work on this legislation. I look forward to its passage next week and its enactment into law. I'm very pleased with our work. The efforts of recent years have paid off. Well done to you all.

HEAD START CONFERENCE REPORT
Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act

Key Policy Highlights
Senator Edward M. Kennedy

ENSURES ACCOUNTABILITY AND QUALITY SERVICES

- Dedicates \$2 million in FY08 to Head Start agencies for local training and improvement efforts.
- Reserves 40% of new Head Start funds for quality enhancements in programs, including salary increases for Head Start staff.
- Guarantees Head Start programs an annual cost-of-living increase.
- Establishes new system for the designation of Head Start grants, and provides for an open competition among agencies with deficient record of non-compliance within Head Start.
- Establishes a new policy for under-enrollment in Head Start programs, including technical assistance and corrective action for grantees with persistent vacancies in their programs (less than 97% enrolled).

- Delineates a clear system of governance for Head Start programs including shared decision making between parent policy councils and governing boards.

ADVANCES PARTICIPATION IN HEAD START PROGRAMS

- New flexibility enables Head Start programs to serve additional low income children and families (up to 130% of federal poverty; \$26,800 for a family of four).
- Reserves \$15 million in FY08 and \$20 million in subsequent years (funds permitting) to expand Indian and Migrant Head Start, in order to serve an additional 5,500 Native American and 5,100 migrant children.
- Improves Head Start enrollment and intake policies to better identify emerging populations of children in poverty.
- Enhances outreach to English language learner children and their families, including procedures to train teachers and assist such children in learning English and developing critical skills.
- Prioritizes homeless children for enrollment in Head Start, and improves transportation for such children to and from programs.
- Ensures that children with disabilities in Head Start are promptly identified and properly served.
- Authorizes \$7.3 billion for Head Start in FY08, \$7.6 billion in FY09, and \$7.9 billion in FY10.

FOCUSES ON SCHOOL READINESS

- Maintains Head Start's comprehensive standards and services.
- Strengthens educational standards in Head Start programs to promote the development of language and literacy, math, science, and other cognitive skills. Ensures such standards are updated and aligned to the latest research in child development, via the National Academy of Sciences.
- Improves the transition of Head Start children to school through better coordination between programs and schools, shared teacher training, and the alignment of curriculum to state early learning standards and kindergarten skills.
- Terminates the flawed Head Start National Reporting System (Bush Administration national test of four and five year olds in Head Start).
- Provides resources to enable parents to ensure their children are ready for school.

ENHANCES THE HEAD START WORKFORCE

- Establishes new goals for the Head Start teaching workforce. Within 6 years:

- All Head Start teachers nationwide must have an Associate's degree;
 - Half of all teachers must have a Bachelor's degree;
 - All Head Start curriculum specialists must have at least a Bachelor's degree; and
 - All Head Start assistant teachers must have at least a child development associate credential and be working toward completing a degree within two years.
- Provides a career advancement plan for every Head Start employee.
 - Establishes new partnerships between Colleges and Universities to better prepare and increase the number of staff serving Native American, African American and Latino children.

STRENGTHENS EARLY HEAD START

- Expands the Early Head Start program by \$83 million (funds permitting), to serve an additional 8,000 low-income infants and toddlers.
- Guarantees comprehensive services, including mental health, socio-emotional development, and other behavioral services in the earliest years.
- Improves the training and assistance network serving Early Head Start, including the designation of infant and toddler specialists in every state.
- Strengthens the Early Head Start workforce, by ensuring training in infant and toddler development for all Early Head Start teachers and new standards for home visitors in Early Head Start programs.

PROMOTES QUALITY ACROSS EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

- Creates a new *State Advisory Council on Early Education and Care* in each state to assess needs across programs serving children from 0-6, and develop recommendations regarding professional development for educators, collaboration between early childhood programs, data collection methods, and the upgrading of early learning standards.
- New *Early Education and Care* federal incentive grants to states (\$100 million, funds permitting) to promote the development and expansion of state early education systems.
- Maintains and expands Head Start Collaboration Offices in each state to assist Head Start programs with:
 - developing local partnerships between Head Start and other child and family agencies;
 - expanding services to children;
 - coordinating training opportunities for Head Start staff; and
 - aligning Head Start curricula and instruction with state early learning standards.