

Castle Leads Effort to Improve "YouthBuild" Job Training Program; Castle Legislation will Increase Job Training and Education Opportunities for At-Risk Youth, Encourages Program Establishment in Delaware -- September 7, 2006

Washington, D.C. -- Seeking to improve job training programs for at-risk youth, Delaware Congressman Mike Castle, the lead sponsor of the YouthBuild Transfer Act yesterday guided passage of this legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives. The Senate passed its companion bill in July. This final version will now go to the President to be signed.

YouthBuild began as a community based organization in 1978, was later replicated in other cities, and ultimately authorized by Congress in 1992. The program provides grants for job training and educational opportunities for at-risk youth who help construct or rehabilitate housing for low-income or homeless families and individuals in their respective communities. Each year, youth who participate in YouthBuild receive a combination of classroom and job skills development and on-site training in a construction trade.

Castle's legislation transfers jurisdiction of the YouthBuild Program from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to the U.S. Department of Labor in an attempt to put more emphasis on the employment and job training aspects of the program. Additionally, the Congressman emphasized the aspect of the legislation that encourages the establishment of programs in states that currently do not have any, such as Delaware.

"This national program addresses housing needs in our communities, but also addresses important educational and workforce needs by providing meaningful opportunities for at-risk youth to acquire the basic education and job skills needed to advance to productive employment and higher education. It is not often the case that a program meets two such important needs. There is no question that high school reform is necessary and that graduation rates must be improved. This program makes a difference in degree attainment and skills improvement," Castle said.

The legislation makes a number of other changes to improve its services to youth, including establishing a stronger linkage to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) One-Stop system's specialized resources, expertise and market knowledge, particularly in connecting individuals to supportive services and placing individuals in education, training, or occupations in demand. In addition, the bill authorizes additional education and workforce investment activities, including occupational skills training, internships and job shadowing, alternative secondary school services, community service and peer-centered activities, and comprehensive guidance and counseling.

Today there is a national network of more than 225 local YouthBuild programs, which have served more than 54,000 young people and built more than 14,000 units of affordable housing in 44 states since 1994.