

Castle Helps Lead Reauthorization of Head Start Bill to Help Low Income Children; Bill Passes in Education Committee and Moves to House Floor -- March 14, 2007

Washington D.C. -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle, Ranking Member of the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education today joined other Members of the Education & Labor Committee in approving legislation he coauthored, the 'Improving Head Start Act of 2007' which reauthorizes the Head Start Early Childhood Education program. The bill, which Congressman Castle introduced with Rep. Kildee, Chairman of the Subcommittee responsible for pre- K-12 education, works to strengthen the current law while focusing on ways to close the readiness gap between Head Start children and more advantaged peers as they enter kindergarten. The legislation, which is based on an early version of a bill also authored by Castle which passed in the 109th Congress, will next move to the floor of the House of Representatives for consideration.

"With the reauthorization of Head Start, we are faced with the opportunity to ensure that our children are beginning school with a solid foundation and the preparation needed for success in the future. This is an extremely serious responsibility and through this legislation, we strive to retain the original goal of enabling economically disadvantaged children to access the same educational, health, nutritional, and social services that are enjoyed by their more advantaged peers while remaining focused on ways to further close the school readiness gap.

"The legislation builds upon efforts made in the last Congress to evolve education performance standards to ensure Head Start students develop language knowledge and skills; pre-mathematics and pre-science knowledge and skills; cognitive abilities related to academic achievement and child development; social and emotional development, early learning, and school success and sustained academic gains; and in the case of limited-English proficient children, progress toward acquisition of the English language. Additionally, we sought to enhance coordination and collaboration between states and local school districts in Head Start and included reforms to ensure greater financial transparency and disclosure so that children are not being hurt by the mismanagement of critical funding," Castle said as the Committee debated his bill.

Currently, Delaware Head Start programs serve over 1,500 children, with almost 500 additional four year olds receiving assistance through state government funding. Throughout the life of this program, Head Start has provided its valuable service to nearly 20 million low-income children and their families throughout the United States.

Castle's Head Start reauthorization legislation works to:

- Strengthen Head Start's Academic Component by emphasizing the proven techniques of development in preparing disadvantaged children for school, improving teacher quality in Head Start, strengthening academic quality standards, and maintain the same local assessments of academic progress.
- Improve fiscal and program management by creating more competition in the Head Start system, seeking better safeguards against financial abuse, and improving disclosure and transparency of Head Start agencies.
- Establish a greater role for states, local School Districts, and parents by creating a greater role for states and local School Districts in Head Start and strengthening the role of parents.
- Expanding the reach and impact of Head Start programs by addressing the unique needs of children in migrant and seasonal and Indian Head Start programs, removing the barriers to ease enrollment of homeless children and preserving all current health and nutrition services for Head Start children.

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