

Wednesday, May 25 , 2005

HELP APPROVES HEAD START REAUTHORIZATION BILL; PRESERVES LEG UP FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, R-WY, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee), today said the committee has approved S. 1107, "The Head Start Improvements for School Readiness Act," which reauthorizes the Head Start program and makes changes to increase accountability, improve overall quality, boost funding for the program.

"Head Start pays dividends. The reauthorization bill we are offering today is critical to ensuring that all children, regardless of background, enter school to learn and succeed," Enzi said Wednesday. "Without Head Start, most of these children would not have the opportunity to attend preschool programs."

The bill, co-sponsored by Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), the HELP Committee's Ranking Member, was passed unanimously by the Committee.

Following hearings on the Head Start program earlier this year, the HELP Committee developed a number of program changes included in S.1107 to improve Head Start's overall performance. In addition, the bill boosts funding by about \$300 million per year over the President's budget request. Under the President's budget, Head Start would be funded at \$6.9 Billion for Fiscal Year 2006.

Key provisions of S. 1107 will:

- Increase accountability and improve the overall quality of Head Start grantees by requiring all grantees to be recompeted every five years;
- Provide priority designation in recompetition for grantees that have not been found deficient or have had an unresolved area of noncompliance left unresolved for more than 120 days;
- Strengthens the role of the Governing Board in the oversight of Head Start programs by clarifying responsibilities regarding legal and financial decisions; additionally policy councils continue to have a collaborative role in decisions regarding operations;
- Continues the active involvement of parents on policy councils;
- Improves Head Start accountability and monitoring;
- Provides the Secretary of Education the authority to terminate a grantee that has multiple and recurring deficiencies and has not made significant and substantial progress toward correcting those deficiencies. Upon termination the grantee will maintain their right to appeal;

- Ends the practice of the federal government paying attorney fees for grantees whose grants have been terminated;
- Improves community needs assessments and requires agencies to take quick action on under-enrollment.

During today's markup, the HELP Committee also unanimously approved S. 518, "The National All Schedules Prescription Electronic Reporting Act of 2005," a bill designed to combat the abuse and diversion of prescription drugs by establishing a Department of Health and Human Services grant program to help states expand Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PMPs).

Key provisions of S.518 include:

- Permitting participating PMPs to share information, subject to appropriate safeguards, with providers, professional licensure or disciplinary bodies, law enforcement, information-sharing partner states, and, for research purposes, other state or federal agencies;
- Requiring that states applying for funds to improve existing programs seek to achieve interoperability with neighboring states that are also operating PMPs.