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**SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY APPLAUDS LONG-AWAITED PASSAGE OF HEAD
START REAUTHORIZATION**

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, released the following statement in response to the passage by the United States Senate of the Improving Head Start Act.

“For forty two years, Head Start has been a lifeline of support for our nation’s neediest children and families. I am pleased that we were able to work together in the Senate to produce a bill that will advance and strengthen this important program. This legislation builds on Head Start’s proven track record, sets ambitious goals to expand the program, and upgrades Head Start’s educational services to better focus on preparing children for school.”

The bill will increase the scope of the Head Start program, doubling the size of Early Head Start over the course of the authorization, and deliver services to over 56,000 additional children. It re-designs the Head Start Collaboration Office in every state to maximize services to Head Start children, align Head Start with kindergarten classrooms, and strengthen its local partnerships with other agencies.

The bill sets a goal to expand Head Start over the next several years. It calls 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.

To improve and expand the availability of quality early childhood education, the Senate Head Start bill designates an Early Care and Education Council in each state to develop a coordinated and comprehensive system of early childhood education and development. The Councils are tasked with conducting an inventory of children’s needs, developing plans for data collection and for supporting early childhood educators, reviewing and upgrading state early learning standards, and making recommendations on technical assistance and training for programs. 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.

Additional flexibility for the Head Start programs is also included, allowing local programs to better tailor services to additional families and children in need. By expanding the eligibility requirements in the program, families who previously were excluded by very slim margins will now qualify for participation in the program. Often, these are the neighbors of Head Start children with similar needs who have been barred from participating in the program.

**REMARKS OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY ON THE PASSAGE OF THE HEAD START
FOR READINESS ACT**

I welcome the Senate’s action on this important legislation, the Head Start for School Readiness Act.

I commend Senator Enzi, Senator Dodd, and Senator Alexander for their bipartisan cooperation on this legislation, and I thank all the Senators on the HELP Committee for their contributions to improving Head Start to meet today’s challenges. We began this process four years ago. Today, our bipartisan efforts have resulted in the strengthening of a forty-two year

old program that has been a lifeline of support for millions of low-income children preparing for school and for life.

Since the War on Poverty, Head Start has delivered the assistance needed to enable disadvantaged children to arrive at school, ready to learn. Its comprehensive services provide balanced meals for children, support visits to the doctor and dentist, and teach young children important learning and social skills. It helps families with the greatest needs get on their feet, and encourages parents to participate actively in their child's early development.

Years of evaluation have demonstrated that Head Start works. A federal survey found that Head Start children make both academic and social gains under the program, and that these gains continue when 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.

Over the years, we've also learned more about how Head Start can be improved. This reauthorization applies that knowledge to make modifications in the program, and it will enable Head Start to be even more effective in the years ahead.

In this legislation, we expand Head Start 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 critical early learning skills and school readiness. We enhance the educational goals for Head Start teachers. We preserve the community-based structure of the program to ensure that the needs of local neighborhoods and their children are the top priority. We also provide greater accountability for the program, including new policies to provide improved monitoring visits and guarantee that programs with deficiencies receive needed attention and support.

To strengthen Head Start, we must begin by providing more resources for it. Child poverty is on the rise again and the need for Head Start is greater than ever. 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 inadequate funding. 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. This legislation expands access to Head Start to serve as many infants, toddlers, and preschool children and their families as possible.

The bill establishes goals to increase funding and expand the program to provide nearly \$8 billion worth of services by 2010. These funding levels are essential to carry out the essential reforms in the legislation and to serve thousands of additional children and families.

In 1994, we enacted Early Head Start to benefit infants, toddlers, and their families. It has worked ever since. 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. Early Head Start parents are more likely to play with their children and read to them. These activities increase a child's desire to learn and strengthen a family's commitment to education. Our bill doubles the size of Early Head Start over the course of the authorization, and includes a commitment to serve 56,000 additional children.

The bill also establishes a Head Start Collaboration Office in every state to improve support for 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 grantees in meeting the goals of preparing children for school.

I'm especially pleased that the bill provides the blueprint needed to upgrade and strengthen other early childhood education programs and services in the states. The bill provides an active role for states in coordinating early childhood education and development programs, and designates an Early Care and Education Council in each state to undertake the

activities essential to developing a comprehensive system for the nation's youngest children.

The councils will conduct an inventory of children's needs, develop plans for data collection, support early childhood educators, review and upgrade early learning standards, and make recommendations on technical assistance and training. For states ready to move forward and implement their statewide plan, the legislation offers \$100 million to support incentive grants for states to implement these important efforts.

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

The bill strengthens literacy efforts currently underway in Head Start programs. We know the key to future reading success is to get young children excited about letters and books and numbers. The bill emphasizes language and literacy, by enhancing the literacy training required of Head Start teachers, continuing to promote parent literacy, and working to put more books into Head Start classrooms and into children's homes.

In addition, we make a commitment in the bill to upgrade all of the educational components of Head Start, and ensure that the 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 leaders 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 only half the salary of kindergarten teachers, and the turnover is high, about 11 percent a year.

Because teacher quality is directly related to a child's outcome, our bill establishes a goal to ensure that every Head Start teacher earns an A.A. degree, and that half earn their B.A. degree by the next time Congress revisits the program. Head Start teachers and staff are the greatest resource for children and families in the program, and investing in their development must be a priority. I look forward to working with my colleagues to match these ambitious goals with the funding needed to make them a reality.

Our legislation also gives local Head Start programs greater authority to assess the needs of families in their communities and define the services necessary to meet those needs. We've lifted the eligibility requirements under the program, so that families living below 130 percent of the federal poverty rate can qualify and participate in Head Start. Yet we still prioritize services to children who need them the most. If programs determine that a greater share of infants and toddlers need services, our bill allows them to apply to the Secretary to convert and expand services to our youngest children. If programs identify a need to provide full-day or full-year care for children and families, they can take steps to do this as well.

Accountability is a cornerstone of excellence in education 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 for children, and to involve parents in their child's growth.

Head Start reviews are already among the most extensive in the field. Our bill takes a further step to improve this process by ensuring that monitoring results and feedback are available to programs and used for their improvement. We also take steps to address programs with serious deficiencies, and ensure that substantial problems in programs do not languish at the expense of children. If a local program is unable to meet Head Start's high standards of quality, others should step in. Every Head Start child deserves to develop and

learn in a high-quality program.

Our bill also takes an important step to suspend the Head Start National Reporting System.

Four years ago, many of us insisted that instead of rushing forward with a national test of hundreds of thousands of children, Head Start would be better served if plans were developed more deliberately to ensure an appropriate means to gather and report child outcomes in programs. That appeal was ignored, and the Administration proceeded with an assessment – without sufficient authorization or oversight from Congress – that was later proven flawed and inconsistent with professional standards for testing and measurement.

This legislation requires that the assessments used in Head Start must be held to the highest standard. Head Start's measures must be valid and reliable, fair to children from all backgrounds, balanced in what they assess, and sufficient to reflect the development of the whole child. We've called on the National Academy of Sciences to survey and study the state of assessments and outcomes appropriate for young children in environments like Head Start. Their study will be of great value as we consider how best to move forward in Head Start and other early childhood settings.

Finally, the bill maintains the essential federal-to-local structure of Head Start, and rejects other proposals that would dilute this important focus. Head Start's design enables it to tailor its services to meet local community needs. Head Start's regulations guarantee a universal standard of quality across all programs. Yet each program is unique and specifically adapted to its children and families. The focus on local neighborhoods and their children must always be at the heart of Head Start.

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 educational skills needed to compete in the modern economy. This process starts early – it begins at birth and continues throughout the early years, long before children enter kindergarten.

The Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 will keep Head Start on its successful path, and enable this vital program to continue to thrive and improve. I look forward to swift passage of this legislation in the Senate, and a productive Conference with the House on the important reforms in this bill.

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; such sums in FY11 and FY12).

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 (national test).
- Supports the National Academy of Sciences review of child outcomes and assessments, based on gold-standard research.
- 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.
- Ensures the re-competition of grantees that have not resolved program deficiencies (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).

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