

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 12, 2007

CONTACT: Melissa Wagoner
(202) 224-2633

KENNEDY REACTION TO BUSH ON HEAD START ENACTMENT

(As Prepared for Delivery)

I applaud President Bush for enacting this landmark reauthorization of the Head Start program. By an overwhelming margin, Congress has elected to keep Head Start on its successful path, and to enable the program to thrive and improve.

With this bill, we're reaching out early to make greater opportunities available for thousands of our neediest children. We're providing a fairer chance for very young children to grow up healthy and safe. We're preparing them to enter school ready to learn, and to graduate from high school ready to go on to college and achieve the American dream.

This reauthorization maintains the high standards and comprehensive services in Head Start. It upgrades the educational aspects and quality of the program. It dedicates greater resources to training Head Start teachers, and sets specific goals for their learning and development. And it expands the successful Early Head Start program to reach up to 8,000 additional infants and toddlers living in poverty.

Two years ago, the Government Accountability Office confirmed many of my long-standing concerns with this Administration's Head Start National Reporting System, concluding that their test of 4- and 5- year olds in the program is not a valid determination about Head Start's quality or about the children it serves. That study also confirmed that the test was inconsistent with nationally-recognized testing standards and unclear in its purpose.

I'm pleased that, on a bipartisan basis, Congress has terminated the flawed National Reporting System. This reauthorization will ensure that any assessment used from this point forward in Head Start programs will be valid and reliable, fair to children from all backgrounds, and measure the whole child. Head Start children and their families deserve nothing less.

The focus on local neighborhoods and their children has always been at the heart of the Head Start program, which is why Congress also rejected the Bush Administration's flawed approach to block grant Head Start. This Administration's block grant for Head Start proposed to block out its guarantee of comprehensive services for children and families. Head Start's design enables it to tailor its services to meet local community needs, and this reauthorization will maintain a universal standard of quality across every Head Start center in the nation.

Most importantly, this reauthorization signals a commitment to invest more in our youngest children, and to assist Head Start in responding to the changing and evolving needs of its children. I am disappointed that President Bush has distanced himself from the funding commitment this bill provides. While the President has asked Congress to approve spending \$433 million per day in Iraq, he says the modest increase in this bill to help our neediest children prepare for school is too much – an increase that, over 3 years, is equivalent to the cost of only two days in Iraq. I hope the President will join Congress in providing the resources needed for Head Start to grow and succeed.

###