



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

July 24, 2003
(House)

STATEMENT OF ADMINISTRATION POLICY

(THIS STATEMENT HAS BEEN COORDINATED BY OMB WITH THE CONCERNED AGENCIES.)

H.R. 2210 - School Readiness Act of 2003

(Rep. Castle (R) DE and 10 cosponsors)

The Administration supports House passage of H.R. 2210, which would take significant steps to strengthen the Head Start program and focus its efforts on preparing children for school. In particular, the Administration strongly supports the inclusion of the State demonstration option, which is largely consistent with the President's proposal. This demonstration would allow up to eight eligible States to coordinate the Head Start program with existing pre-kindergarten efforts. The Administration supports the provision that would require those States to provide at least the same level of services that Head Start children now receive, as well as a provision stipulating that standards proposed by States generally must meet or exceed those of the Federal Head Start program.

This important legislation would make a number of changes to improve and strengthen the services provided by the Head Start program, including: (1) creating new quality standards that ensure that children in the program develop school readiness skills; (2) requiring Head Start applicants to demonstrate the capacity to serve eligible children with scientifically based programs that promote school readiness and meet quality standards; and (3) enhancing coordination and collaboration between Head Start and other publicly funded early childhood education programs, public schools, community and faith based organizations, and museums and libraries. All grantees would be required to meet certain school readiness outcomes in order to be refunded. If grantees do not meet these outcomes, they will be given training and technical assistance. If they still fail to meet school readiness outcomes, their grants will be recompleted.

The Administration strongly supports the provision of the bill that protects the hiring autonomy of religious organizations participating in the Head Start program. This provision extends to Head Start grantees an exemption similar to the exemption for hiring by religious organizations that has been in place under title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for over 30 years. Exemptions such as the one proposed in the bill have been adopted for other Federal programs in laws enacted by Congress since 1996. These laws permit faith-based groups to hire according to their beliefs as they administer federally funded welfare-to-work, community service, and drug treatment programs. This bill would give such groups receiving assistance under the Head Start Act the same autonomy in hiring. The Administration understands that an amendment may be offered on the House floor that would strike this provision from the bill. The full involvement of the faith community is essential to mobilize America's "armies of

compassion” and the House is urged to defeat any such amendment. If such an amendment is adopted, the President’s senior advisors would recommend that he veto the bill.

This legislation significantly improves the quality of the Head Start program, particularly through more effective accountability measures. It is important to ensure that there is enough flexibility in the program to respond to changing needs. In particular, the Administration recommends balancing requirements for program administration with the desire to improve program participation. The Administration is committed to working with the Congress to address this issue and additional technical issues with this important legislation.

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