

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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**Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing on “H.R. 2343:
The Education Begins at Home Act”**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “H.R. 2343: The Education Begins at Home Act.”*

Good morning. Welcome to today's hearing on "H.R. 2343: The Education Begins At Home Act." Today we will examine bipartisan legislation that will help strengthen American families by expanding early childhood home visitation programs for parents and children.

Throughout this Congress, we have explored how we can help every child arrive at kindergarten ready to learn.

Last year, we took important steps towards this goal by enacting legislation to reinvigorate our nation's Head Start program.

This is just the beginning of our efforts. We know that investing in our youngest children is essential to boosting our nation's competitiveness.

We must make a long-term commitment to promoting positive growth and development in our children – and in those who play the most significant role in their early years: Parents.

Research tells us that the relationships that form between a parent and a child during the first three years of life – when 85 percent of brain growth occurs – are especially influential on a child's cognitive and behavioral development.

Early childhood home visitation programs provide parents with education and supportive services to help them better understand the learning and developmental needs of their children and build long-lasting parent-child bonds.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of families benefit from these support services, which range from pre-natal medical care and health services to family literacy programs.

For many parents, the most valuable support these programs have provided has been emotional.

For military families, who often face unique parenting circumstances, home visits can make a world of difference when one parent is deployed or returning from overseas duty.

The Parents as Teachers program at the Fort Bragg military base in North Carolina, helped one mother going through an especially hard time during her husband's multiple deployments.

When her young son began acting out aggressively in child care and refusing to talk to his father on the phone during his rotations, the Parents as Teachers staff helped the mother find ways to develop a closer bond and better communication between her husband and son.

As several of our experts will explain today, early childhood home visitation programs provide far-reaching benefits: Helping to increase student achievement, improve access to preventative medical care, reduce high school dropout rates, and decrease maternal depression.

For example, according to an evaluation of the Parent-Child Home program in South Carolina, 93 percent of program participants who were eligible for free lunch passed the state's first grade skills assessment, in contrast to only 74 percent of free-lunch-eligible students overall.

And as Joan Ohl, the Bush administration's Commissioner for Children, Youth and Families recently highlighted, home visits are an effective approach to preventing child abuse by helping parents deal with the stresses of raising children.

Yet for too long, the federal government has not invested enough in programs that support families and children during these first years of life.

The Education Begins at Home Act would create, for the first time, a federal funding framework for home visitation programs, ensuring that the federal government plays a role in helping communities better plan for and provide quality services to families.

It would authorize \$400 million in grants to states, tribal organizations, and territories over three years.

The bill would also create competitive grant programs to expand access to home visitation services for military families and families with limited-English proficiency.

In addition, the bill would help states create partnerships between programs and related community services.

Preparing children for success in school and in life begins in the home. This legislation is about strengthening and supporting families – an investment that is in the best interests of our children, our communities, and our future.

I'd like to welcome all of our witnesses and thank them for joining us today.

I'd especially like to thank Congressmen Danny Davis and Todd Platts, for introducing this bill, as well as Senator Kit Bond, who has introduced companion legislation in the Senate.

Thank you.

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