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## **PEW'S PRE-K NOW CAMPAIGN WELCOMES CONGRESSIONAL ACTION ON PRESIDENT'S \$10 BILLION EARLY LEARNING PLEDGE**

WASHINGTON, D.C. — July 17, 2009 — Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Pew Center on the States, applauded the promise this week by House Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller to act on a legislative package containing a \$10 billion, 10-year investment to strengthen state early learning programs, including pre-kindergarten. The proposal, if enacted, would fulfill a pledge by President Obama and arrives at a critical juncture for state leaders working diligently to protect early education funding.

“Pew has supported state efforts to increase pre-kindergarten access and quality for eight years, and the Early Learning Challenge Fund would help continue the drive toward evidence-based early education policy for the next decade,” said Libby Doggett, deputy director of the Pew Center on the States. “This funding will give states strong incentives to raise program quality, demonstrate results and ensure that the children who benefit most from pre-k receive priority.”

The proposed federal “challenge grants” would be awarded to states competitively to support development of comprehensive early learning systems. Thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia currently offer voluntary pre-k, but despite a doubling of state funding since 2002 to \$5.3 billion, only 24 percent of four-year-olds and four percent of three-year-olds were enrolled in 2008, nationally.

Governors and state legislators of both parties have made pre-k a core priority, even amid worsening budget gaps. States such as New Jersey and Texas increased funding for pre-k during their 2009 legislative sessions, and Alaska and Rhode Island approved money for new pilot initiatives. Severe cuts to early learning programs are being debated, however, in Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

“Many state leaders have resolved to spend scarce dollars on high-quality pre-k because it prepares all children for success in school and has proven economic benefits for families and taxpayers, in both the short- and long-term,” said Doggett. “Federal support for state early education efforts has never been more important, and we look forward to working with the Obama administration and House and Senate leaders on Chairman Miller’s legislation.”

The early learning proposal is part of a broader package of higher education and student loan provisions that is expected to receive quick consideration from the House Education and Labor Committee. Chairman Miller’s legislation would reform the federal student loan program to achieve significant savings, including funds to pay for the early learning grants.

### ***About the Pew Center on the States and Pre-K Now***

*The Pew Center on the States identifies and advances state policy solutions. Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Pew Center on the States, collaborates with advocates and policymakers to lead a movement toward high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all three and four year olds. Online at [www.pewcenteronthestates.org](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org) and [www.preknow.org](http://www.preknow.org).*