



FINAL HEAD START REAUTHORIZATION PASSES HOUSE AND SENATE

November 15, 2007

On Wednesday, November 14, the House and Senate passed the “Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007.” The legislation, which reauthorizes the Head Start Act, now moves on to the President’s desk. President Bush is expected to sign the measure into law before the end of the year.

The “Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007” contains numerous provisions on homeless children and children in foster care.

- Includes a definition of homelessness consistent with the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
- Requires the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to issue regulations that require Head Start agencies to:
 - Ensure that homeless children are identified and prioritized for enrollment
 - Allow homeless families to apply to, enroll in, and attend Head Start programs while required documents are obtained within a reasonable time frame
 - Coordinate individual Head Start centers and programs with efforts to implement Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
- Specifies that homeless children are deemed eligible for Head Start services
- For agencies operating with actual enrollments that are lower than funded enrollments, requires the Secretary to collaboratively develop plans and timetables for reducing under-enrollment, taking into consideration changing demographics, mobility of populations, and the identification of new underserved low-income populations. If, after receiving technical assistance and developing and implementing a plan for reducing under-enrollment, a Head Start agency still operates with less than 97 percent enrollment, the Secretary may recapture or withhold funds. However, the Secretary can waive or reduce funding reductions if causes of enrollment shortfalls include serving significant numbers of highly mobile children, the shortfall is not significant, or the shortfall can reasonably be expected to be temporary.
- Requires as a criteria for applicants for new Head Start programs a plan to meet the needs of homeless children and children in foster care, including transportation needs
- Includes as a consideration in allocating funds to expand existing Head Start programs:
 - The extent to which applicants have undertaken community-wide strategic planning and needs assessments involving the LEA homeless liaison, and organizations providing services to children in foster care, homeless children, child abuse prevention services, and protective services
 - The extent to which applicants coordinate with LEA homeless liaisons
- Allows quality improvement funds to be used for staff training, child counseling, and other services to address the challenges of homeless children, children in foster care, and children referred by child welfare agencies

- Requires Head Start State Collaboration Directors to develop a strategic plan that will enhance collaboration and coordination with, and services provided for, homeless children, children in foster care, and children referred to Head Start programs by child welfare agencies, including agencies and State officials responsible for such services
- Requires Head Start agencies to coordinate and collaborate with the agencies responsible for administering section 106 of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Parts B and E of title IV of the Social Security Act, and programs under Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
- Requires each Head Start program to establish channels of communication between Head Start staff and McKinney-Vento liaisons to facilitate coordination of programs
- Requires Head Start programs to develop and implement a family outreach and support program in coordination with outreach efforts under the McKinney-Vento Act
- Requires Early Head Start programs to coordinate services with programs in the community for homeless infants and toddlers
- Provides funds for technical assistance to Early Head Start programs to create special training and technical assistance initiatives targeted to serving high risk populations, such as children in the child welfare system and homeless children, and provide professional development designed to increase program participation for underserved populations of eligible children
- Requires the Secretary to establish standards for Head Start agencies, through regulation, taking into consideration best practices with respect to homeless children and children in foster care, and changes in the population of children who are eligible to participate in Head Start programs, including the family structure of such children (including children in foster care and the number of homeless children)
- Requires the Secretary to provide technical assistance to improve outreach to, increase program participation of, and improve quality of services available to meet the unique needs of homeless children
- Requires the Secretary to provide, either directly or through grants or other arrangements, funds to support training for personnel providing services to children determined to be abused or neglected, or children referred by or receiving child welfare services, and to address the needs of homeless families
- Requires the Secretary to ensure that reviews are conducted by review teams that include individuals who are knowledgeable, to the maximum extent practicable, about the needs of homeless children and children in foster care
- Requires the Secretary to carry out research, evaluation, and demonstration activities in order to use the Head Start programs to develop, test, and disseminate new ideas and based on existing scientifically based research, for addressing the needs of low-income preschool children (including children with disabilities, homeless children, children who have been abused or neglected, and children in foster care)
- Requires Head Start programs to collect data on the number of homeless children and children in foster care participating in the program
- Requires the Secretary to prepare a report on the status of children in Head Start programs, including homeless children, children in foster care, and children referred by child welfare agencies