

LARSON: LEAVE HEAD START ALONE GOP Plan Will Reduce Standards and Accountability for Successful Education Program in Eight States, Including Connecticut

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 25, 2003

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GOP Plan Will Reduce Standards and Accountability for Successful Education Program in Eight States, Including Connecticut

WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today voted against legislation that would turn the successful Head Start education program for disadvantaged children into block grants in eight states, including Connecticut, which would reduce accountability and ignore performance standards. The Head Start reauthorization bill, H.R. 2210, would allow states to qualify for a block grant simply by having a state preschool program, regardless of the quality, components, size or proven record of that state program. It also allows states to run Head Start programs with lower educational standards, minimal comprehensive services, less oversight and accountability and no evidence that they do a job equal to or better than Head Start. It passed the House by a one vote margin, 217 - 216.

Larson stated: "This legislation is the first step in the process of completely dismantling a very significant early childhood education program by turning it into a block grant initiative for states without requiring them to live up to any Head Start performance standards. The bill diverts funds from local programs to state governments while at the same time relieving states of the responsibility to meet the current federal performance standards that have made Head Start so successful. This change will result in reduced performance standards, accountability and oversight, ending the Department of Health and Human Services review process and weakening the program.

"For nearly 40 years, Head Start has successfully served millions of children through comprehensive services to ensure they are ready for school. The GOP Leadership effort to dismantle this program is little more than an ideological exercise cloaked in rhetoric about collaboration with states and improving outcomes. It is an unjustified, unnecessary experiment on a successful program that is less about real policy and more about advancing a political agenda," said Larson.

The legislation also repeals current civil rights protections and allows programs to discriminate in their hiring practices based on religion.

Begun in 1964 under President Lyndon Johnson, Head Start is one of the most evaluated federal programs, and research concludes that Head Start works. Children who attend Head Start exceed national norms in vocabulary, early writing, letter recognition and social behavior, and they enter school better prepared than low-income children who do not attend Head Start. Head Start students are less likely to need special education services, are less likely to repeat a grade, are more likely to graduate from high school and are less likely to commit crimes during adolescence.

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