

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 11, 2008

VIA FACSIMILE – 202-690-7203

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Room 615F
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

We are writing to thank you for appointing your Advisory Committee on Re-Designation of Head Start Grantees pursuant to the recent bipartisan reauthorization of the Head Start Act, but also to express our concerns about the Committee's composition and our hopes for its activities.

On December 12, 2007, President Bush signed into law the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. We believe this bipartisan effort includes numerous important reforms that will build on Head Start's success and ensure that every center follows science-based practices for supporting early learning and exhibits strong program management and accountability practices.

During the reauthorization process, Congress carefully examined and deliberated using a system of limited re-competition of Head Start programs as one method to strengthen Head Start and reach our goal of delivering every eligible child and family the high-quality comprehensive services necessary to succeed in school and in life. Head Start has been the premier early education program in our country for more than 40 years and remains a cornerstone in our efforts to close the achievement gap, combat poverty, and provide all our citizens with the opportunity to thrive. The overwhelming majority of Head Start programs more than meet the Act's high standards, and the new law is meant to ensure that every program meets those standards. The new law reflects this careful deliberation and we believe, if implemented correctly, will improve the overall Head Start program.

However, we are concerned with the level of involvement of some members of your Advisory Committee with the former National Reporting System, and particularly with your appointment of Dr. Craig Ramey as Chair of that Committee. Dr. Ramey's credentials and work as an early childhood researcher are well-regarded. However, Dr. Ramey also previously served as the Co-Chair of the Technical Work Group that you designated and charged with advising and implementing the National Reporting System and we are concerned that this experience makes him a potentially divisive figure. As you are aware, the National Reporting System was heavily criticized by numerous experts and researchers in child development and early education, and an audit by the General Accounting Office found that the child assessment was flawed, inconsistent with nationally-recognized standards for testing and measurement, and lacked validity in its

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application and use in Head Start programs. For these and other reasons, Congress terminated the National Reporting System with strong bipartisan support in the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007.

The appointment of a non-voting Chair to the Advisory Committee on Re-Designation is not contemplated by the law and does not appear to be in keeping with assurances recently provided by your staff – that is, responsibilities of such individual would simply be logistical and the choice would be made without controversy. Unfortunately, given Dr. Ramey’s involvement in the development and implementation of the National Reporting System, we believe his nomination will be met with anxiety and concern by local Head Start programs and ultimately may be detrimental to the broader objective of effectively implementing these essential accountability provisions in Head Start programs.

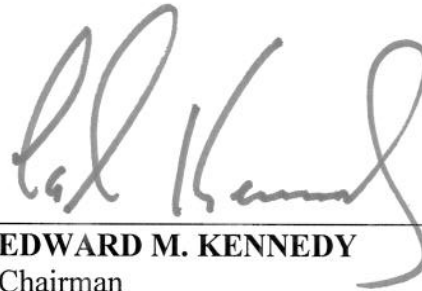
We hope that the Advisory Committee’s activities will exemplify the forward-looking, bipartisan spirit of the reauthorization and therefore respectfully request you reconsider this appointment. We look forward to your response and to continuing our work with you on the implementation of this important law.

Sincerely,



GEORGE MILLER

Chairman
House Committee on Education & Labor



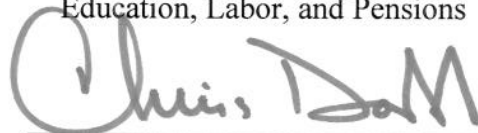
EDWARD M. KENNEDY

Chairman
Senate Committee on Health,
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Chairman
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
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