



WASHINGTON BUREAU · NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
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ACTION ALERT

DATE: April 23, 2007
TO: Concerned Parties
FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director, Washington Bureau

NAACP–Supported Head Start Reauthorization Threatened by Provision to Eliminate Civil Rights Protections

URGE HOUSE MEMBERS TO OPPOSE MOTION TO RECOMMIT

THE ISSUE:

Since its inception more than 40 years ago, the Head Start program has protected employees and volunteers from employment discrimination based on religion in federally-funded positions in Head Start programs. Due in part to this provision the Head Start program has flourished, and many Head Start programs today are run by churches, temples, mosques and other houses of worship.

The NAACP strongly supports the Head Start program and has consistently advocated for its expansion to help all eligible American children. Head Start remains a cornerstone in this country's efforts to combat poverty and provide all its citizens with the opportunity to thrive. Because Head Start has proven to be so successful in helping millions of American children and families, the NAACP strongly supports H.R. 1429, the *Improving Head Start Act of 2007*, which reauthorizes the program and makes some much-needed improvements, including improving teacher and classroom quality; boosting coordination between Head Start and state and local early childhood programs; increasing the program's accountability; and expanding access to the program. The NAACP was pleased to see H.R. 1429 pass out of the House Education and Labor Committee by a strong bi-partisan vote of 42 -1.

One amendment that was rejected during committee consideration would have allowed religious organizations participating in Head Start to discriminate in hiring decisions based on religion (it was known as the "Charitable Choice" amendment). If it had been accepted, it would mean that thousands of Head Start employees and volunteers, whose positions are paid for by American taxpayers, would be at risk of losing their jobs based solely on their religious preference. The NAACP ardently opposed this amendment, as it opens the door to blatant discrimination using federal dollars and because it is unnecessary; many houses of worship already participate in the Head Start program under the existing rules without problems. We were thus extremely pleased to see the amendment defeated. The bill will now be considered by the full House of Representatives (possibly as soon as the week of April 23) without the offending language.

After consideration of amendments to the bill, but just prior to final passage, Congressman John Boehner (OH) is expected to offer a "Motion to Recommit," which would send the bill back to the committee and require the inclusion of the Charitable Choice religious discrimination provision which would allow providers to circumvent traditional civil rights protections. **The NAACP is calling on all members and friends to contact their representatives and urge them to support the underlying bill and to oppose the "Motion to Recommit."**

[More...](#)

THE ACTION WE NEED YOU TO TAKE:

Contact your Representative and **URGE HIM OR HER TO SUPPORT H.R. 1429 AND OPPOSE THE MOTION TO RECOMMIT.** To contact your Representative, you may:

✓ **Make a Phone Call:**

Call your Representative in Washington by dialing the Capitol Switchboard and asking to be transferred to your Congressman's office. The switchboard phone number is **(202) 224-3121** (see message section, below).

✓ **Write a Letter**

To write a letter to your Representative, send it to:
The Honorable (name of Representative)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

**A SAMPLE
LETTER IS
ATTACHED**

✓ **Send a Fax**

If you would like to send a fax, call your Representative's office (through the Capitol switchboard) and ask for his/her fax number (you can use either the attached sample letter or the message box, below).

✓ **Send an E-Mail**

To send an e-mail to your Representative, go to www.house.gov, and click on "Write Your Representative" (on the left hand side, just under "find your Representative"). This will help you identify who your congressman is and how to contact him/her.

No time to
send a
letter!
Call, fax or
e-mail
TODAY!

THE MESSAGE

- Head Start has worked for more than 40 years, and remains a cornerstone in this country's efforts to combat poverty and provide all its citizens with the opportunity to thrive.
- We must not allow the success of Head Start to be threatened by the elimination of traditional civil rights protections.
- Since the inception of the program, religious organizations participating in the Head Start program have made and continue to make an invaluable contribution to the education of millions of students; they have been able to do so playing by federal law which currently does not allow discrimination.
- Inclusion of the Charitable Choice religious discrimination provision would put thousands of Head Start employees and volunteers, whose positions are paid for by American taxpayers, at risk of losing their jobs based solely on their religious preference.
- If adopted this amendment could open the door to blatant discrimination using federal dollars.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER!!!
If you have any questions, call Hilary Shelton at the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940.

MEMBERSHIP IS POWER! JOIN THE NAACP TODAY.

To become an NAACP member or to sign up for e-mail legislative and press updates, visit www.naacp.org

Sample Letter

(date)

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

**RE: SUPPORT HEAD START REAUTHORIZATION / OPPOSE MOTION TO
RECOMMIT WHICH WOULD ALLOW DISCRIMINATION USING TAXPAYERS'
MONEY**

Dear Representative _____;

As your constituent, I am writing to let you know of my strong support for H.R. 1429, the *Improving Head Start Act of 2007*, and my opposition to any Motion to Recommit which would include a repeal of long-standing critical civil rights protections.

As reported out of the House Education and Labor Committee, by a strong bipartisan vote of 42 -1, the legislation retains a 35-year old civil rights provision that protects Head Start employees and volunteers from employment discrimination based on religion in federally-funded positions in Head Start programs. This is a fundamental civil rights protection, and one that has enjoyed strong bipartisan support from both the House and Senate. The civil rights provisions have worked well, allowing religious organizations to participate in Head Start while maintaining Constitutional and civil rights standards.

Religious organizations participating in the Head Start program have made and continue to make an invaluable contribution to the education of millions of students. Over the past four decades, these religious organizations have complied with Head Start's existing civil rights requirements. However, if the repeal of the existing civil rights protections were to become law, teachers or parent volunteers working in any Head Start program run by a religious organization could immediately lose their jobs because of their religion. Students participating in Head Start therefore could lose not only their teachers, but also the close programmatic connection with their own parents volunteering in the program. The NAACP strongly believes that allowing discrimination based on religion would significantly impede the important goals of Head Start, harm the Head Start students' education by separating them from their own teachers and parent volunteers, and send a damaging message to the students, their parents, guardians and loved ones, as well as people throughout our nation.

Thus, I urge you again, in the strongest terms possible, to support the continued inclusion of these longstanding and critical civil rights protections by opposing the motion to recommit, and to support the reauthorization of this very important program. The Head Start program is too critical to our children and our nation's future to allow support for it to be divided by this issue. I look forward to hearing from you on this matter and to your letting me know what I can do to protect the integrity of this program.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name and
remember to include your address)