

HOUSE RENEWS HEAD START PROGRAM

(WASHINGTON, DC) - U.S. Representative Neil Abercrombie supported House passage this week of a highly important piece of legislation overshadowed by Congressional passage and presidential veto of emergency funding for Iraq: the “Improving Head Start Act of 2007.”

The Head Start legislation renewed the acclaimed pre-school program, which provides early childhood education for more than 3,000 low-income students in Hawaii. Created in 1965, Head Start is the longest-running program for stopping the cycle of poverty in the United States. It provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families.

“As we reauthorized Head Start, we took the opportunity to make several significant improvements,” said Abercrombie. “We eliminated the rigid testing system required by the Bush Administration, which completely ignores solid research on the way young children learn. We also took steps to improve the quality of the teachers, requiring that 50% of all Head Start teachers in the country have a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education by 2013, and requiring increases in pay and professional development for those teachers.”

The House also rejected a move to allow faith-based Head Start providers to limit hiring to employees of particular faiths or denominations.

“Not only would this violate our fundamental religious freedom and sense of fairness,” Abercrombie said. “But it also flies in the face of the idea of trying to hire the very best people.”