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## The Strong Start for America's Children Act (S.1697/H.R.3461)

You have already learned about why high quality early childhood development and learning is so important for young children. This fact sheet will tell you about a **bill** currently in **Congress**: the Strong Start for America's Children Act, that will help make sure that all children can have a high quality early childhood experience!

### What does the Strong Start for America's Children Act do?

The Strong Start for America's Children Act is an important bill introduced by **Senator** Tom Harkin and **Representatives** George Miller and Richard Hanna. If this Act were to become a law it would help make sure that children all across the country have access to high quality early childhood development and learning experiences. The Act would:

- Help states pay for high quality preschool for children whose families do not have enough money to pay for it themselves. These preschool programs would have to meet some important requirements to make sure the children they serve are getting the best experience possible, including:
  - Having preschool teachers who have graduated from college and studied early childhood education.
  - Making sure there are no more than 10 children for every teacher. Otherwise it might be too easy for the other children to distract each other!
  - Providing children with healthy food and healthy check-ups. It is much easier to learn if you aren't distracted by hunger, cavities or being sick!
  - Involving parents in the program so that they know how their children are doing in preschool and what areas they need more help with.
- Provide extra money for states that do not currently have preschool programs so they can get them started.
- Work to improve the quality of child care centers and homes that infants and toddlers from birth through age 3 are already living in. **Early Head Start** centers would get extra money from the government to help these child care programs in communities provide extra training to their workers and extra services for their children!
- Encourage increased **investments** in home visiting programs. These programs provide resources and advice to new parents who want additional help with their babies or are not quite sure how best to be good parents!

### How does a bill become a law?

A bill being introduced in Congress is only the first step to it becoming a law. Both the Senate and the House of Representatives must pass the bill and the President has to sign it before it becomes a law. This is a long and difficult process, so many bills never become laws.

1. **A bill is introduced in Congress.** The Strong Start for America's Children Act was introduced on November 13, 2013.
2. **Both Houses of Congress pass the bill.** There are two Houses of Congress: The Senate and the House of Representatives. For a bill to become law, a **majority** of the members in both houses must vote in favor of the bill. There are 435 Representatives in the House of Representatives and 100 Senators in the Senate. How many members of each House must vote for the Strong Start for America's Children Act for it to pass Congress?
3. **The President signs the bill.** After a bill passes Congress the President gets the final decision on whether to sign it into law or to **veto** it. If he signs the bill it becomes a law, but if he vetoes it, Congress gets another chance to pass it, although 2/3's of the members of both Houses would have to vote for a bill to override a veto by the President.

### What does this have to do with voting?

The most important person in this process is not a Representative, Senator or President; but the voter. Any U.S. citizen at least 18 years old can vote to choose who they want to represent them in the House of Representatives, the Senate and the White House. Members of Congress and the President then decide what will become law. Before an election it is important to do research on the candidates to see if you agree with how they will vote on children's concerns, like early childhood development and learning, and cast your vote for the person you think will best protect and serve children. Elections occur every 2 years for Representatives, every 6 years for Senators and every 4 years for Presidents so there are lots of chances for voters to have their voices heard. If you are not old enough to vote yet you should ask your parents if they are voting and ask them to talk about children and the issues they think are important when choosing who to vote for!

### Key Vocabulary

- **Bill:** A proposed law in Congress.
- **Congress:** The legislative branch of the United States government. It's Congress's job to write and vote on laws and represent the people from their states and districts.
- **Senator:** A member of the Senate. The Senate is the smaller branch of Congress. There are 100 Senators, two from every state. Do you know the Senators from your state?
- **Representative:** A member of the House of Representatives. The House is the larger branch of Congress. There are 435 Representatives, one from every congressional district. Do you know your Representative?
- **Early Head Start:** A program that provides high quality early childhood experiences for infants and toddlers from birth to age 3.
- **Investment:** The act of putting time, money or resources to something with the intention of getting something back over time.
- **Majority:** More than half.
- **Veto:** An action in which the President rejects a bill passed by Congress.