

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, today I have vetoed House Bill 635 – Education – Early Childhood Educational and Developmental Programs.

The bill has two components. The first component of House Bill 635 is the dissemination of information to parents of at-risk children. The second component mandates funding for Head Start and the Judy Centers at fiscal 2003 levels. There are several reasons for my veto, which I will discuss in turn.

Regarding the first component, House Bill 635 is duplicative, because the public awareness campaign is underway. In fact, the bill recognizes that dissemination of information is already occurring with the Maryland Public Engagement Campaign and the five-year action agenda for achieving school readiness, which was presented to the Subcabinet for Children, Youth, and Families by the Leadership in Action Program. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), with other agencies, already disseminates information to parents of at-risk children about early childhood education and other services for young children. Moreover, for the past three years, MSDE has collaborated with not only Head Start and the Judy Centers, but also with pre-kindergarten programs and child care centers to raise awareness of these programs for all parents of young children. One significant omission in the definition of “Early Childhood Educational and Developmental Program” is the home-based family child care provider. These providers form a significant portion of the child care field, and are encompassed in existing endeavors. Therefore, this component of House Bill 635 is unnecessary and duplicative of on-going efforts.

The second component, mandating funding for Head Start and the Judy Centers, is bad fiscal policy. As a result, the Department of Budget and Management opposed the bill during the legislative session. House Bill 635 requires that funding for these particular early childhood programs – to the exclusion of others that were in the original bill – be funded at the fiscal 2003 level. The fiscal 2003 level is \$3 million for Head Start and \$7.6 million for the Judy Centers. Other worthwhile and effective programs, such as the Child Care Resource and Referral Network, have not been singled out for such preferential treatment.

As you know, approximately half of Maryland’s \$22 billion budget is comprised of mandates. Given the current fiscal crisis facing Maryland, the creation of more mandated funding would reduce even further flexibility in the general fund budget, and the ability to balance the budget in future years. While \$10.6 million may not seem like much money relative to the entire budget, there are several bills that have passed the 2003 legislative session that include mandates. When the whole budget picture is examined, it is clear that enacting the mandate contained in House Bill 635 is unwise fiscal policy for the State of Maryland.

My commitment to education generally, and early childhood education and development in particular, is firm. In fact, my supplemental budget request contained an additional \$2 million for Maryland’s children. Although I veto House Bill 635, MSDE and the existing early childhood education and developmental programs will continue to disseminate information to all parents, and funding will continue, as available, for early childhood programs – not simply for the two listed in the bill.

For the above stated reasons, I have vetoed House Bill 635.