

CHARLOTTE HALL - Congressman Steny Hoyer today joined community leaders on education and child care issues to observe how a federal grant in the amount of \$540,165 that the Southern Maryland Child Care Resource Center received for early learning opportunities is being implemented. Rep. Hoyer was briefed about the Center's use of the grant by Executive Director Becky Stevens and the Center staff.

"Working parents are justifiably concerned about three things when it comes to child care - quality, accessibility, and affordability," said Congressman Hoyer. "However, for many parents, it is a constant struggle to find affordable, good-quality care for their children. Therefore, it is critical that organizations such as the Southern Maryland Child Care Resource Center receive the appropriate federal support to ensure that they are able to provide necessary resources to parents and child caregivers."

Late last year the Southern Maryland Child Care Resource Center (SMCCRC) received an Early Learning Opportunities Grant in the amount of \$540,165 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The grant is being used to improve school readiness with a particular emphasis on pre-literacy skills.

The Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services Child Care Bureau on children, youth and families. ELOA was passed by Congress to provide grants to local councils to enable them to increase, support, expand and better coordinate early learning opportunities for children and their families through local community organizations. However, the President's budget requested no funding for the Early Learning Opportunities Program for fiscal year 2005.

The SMCCRC is one of three local councils in Maryland to receive an ELOA grant. Of the 172 applications received nationwide, 43 local councils in 28 states were awarded ELOA grants.

As a senior member of the Appropriations Subcommittee that funds the Department of Health and Human Services, Congressman Hoyer has strongly supported ELOA funding that benefits programs like the SMCCRC and supported an alternative fiscal year 2005 federal budget that gave the grant program a slight increase in funding.

The Southern Maryland Child Care Resource Center is a private non-profit agency that works

with parents, child care providers, businesses, and community organizations to help promote the availability of quality child care in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties. They provide parents with child care referrals and information on evaluating quality child care, plus resources on various parenting issues.

A primary service of the Resource Center is to provide training and education to child care providers who are required to complete a certain number of educational hours of training to become licensed or to renew licensing from the Child Care Administration. The more training and education a child care provider has, the higher quality of care they are able to offer to children.

Finally, the SMCCRC also has a partnership with St. Mary's Hospital to provide health trainings for the Resource Center. The hospital provides general health workshops on health issues including illnesses and precautions.

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