



PRESS ADVISORY

Council of the District of Columbia

Office of Chairman Vincent C. Gray
The John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

For Immediate Release:
April 1, 2008

Contact: Doxie A. McCoy
202-724-8032

Groundbreaking Gray Pre-K Bill Moves Forward *Historic Universal Health Care Bill Introduced*

Washington, DC—Council Chairman Vincent C. Gray thanked his colleagues and advocates of early childhood education for their support of his Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act as the Council approved the measure on first reading at the legislative meeting today. The bill would establish a voluntary, high quality pre-school program and provide 2,000 new pre-kindergarten classroom slots for underserved children over the next six years. The program would be administered by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, which will work with existing programs to raise their classroom and teacher standards where needed. Grants will be available for teacher training and advancement to help programs meet high quality standards. The Council is expected to approve the bill on final reading at its May legislative session.

Gray said, "I am pleased that the Council has taken this step toward making an important investment in our children." He said by educating 3 and 4-year olds early on, they have a greater chance of success throughout school, and "we hopefully won't be looking at a 50 percent drop out rate when these young people reach high school."

Gray also was pleased to introduce with Councilmember David Catania and five other Councilmembers the Healthy DC Act to achieve the goal of universal health coverage in the District of Columbia by 2010. The bill would offer affordable health coverage for 45,000 uninsured D.C. residents. Many of the uninsured are working mothers, who are not offered or cannot afford the insurance available through their employers, and earn too much money to qualify for Medicaid or the DC Healthcare Alliance.

The cost of Healthy DC would be shared by the recipients, the District and CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, which would offer the insurance. The District's subsidy would be generated by doubling the \$1 tax on a pack of cigarettes and through other health-related taxes.

(More)

"I am incredibly proud to co-introduce a bill that will achieve the goal of universal health coverage in the District of Columbia by 2010," Gray said. "This is just the kind of

program we need to strengthen our health care system, promote preventive care rather than use of emergency rooms and avoidable hospitalization, as well as soften the burden paid by the insured and the government.”

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