

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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LWVSC POSITION ON 4 YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN (4K) & CHILD CARE February 2008

Brief Background

States nationwide are improving the quality and availability of 4 year-old kindergarten and child care programs.

4K - South Carolina legislators have recently begun this process with 4K. Following the Abbeville County School District et al. vs. South Carolina decision in December 2005, the SC Legislature passed legislation setting up a two-year pilot program expanding 4K for at-risk children into the 37 plaintiff school districts.

The SC Education Oversight Committee (EOC), charged with on-going evaluation of the pilot, has recommended that 4K be expanded to all at-risk children at the end of the pilot in May 2008. Legislation has been introduced in both the SC House and the SC Senate expanding 4K to all at-risk 4 year-olds.

Child Care: SC regulations governing the health and safety of child care facilities, and the children in the facilities, are among the weakest in the country. The ability of the SC Department of Social Services (DSS) to introduce improved regulations is curtailed by an advisory committee heavily weighted in favor of the child care industry. Further, the power of DSS to enforce regulations is limited. Legislation has been introduced in the Senate to strengthen DSS regulatory power.

What You Should Know

4K Legislation

S 815 - Expands 4K to all at-risk children (eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or Medicaid) by 2012-2013. Lead teachers must have 4-year degree in early childhood or closely related field by 2012 or be granted a waiver. Both public schools and private centers may include 4K classes with the State Department of Education (SDE) administering in schools and State Office of First Steps administering for private centers.

Proviso 1.64 - Continues the current pilot program for one more year, subject to available funding. H3175, expanding 4K to all at-risk children, was sent back to House Ways and Means during the last session and has not been acted on.

Child Care Legislation

S 1004 - Allows DSS to levy fines if child care facilities do not meet health and safety regulations, i.e., \$1,000 fine for abuse or neglect of a child with possibility of a prison sentence. Requires DSS to inspect child care homes once every 3 years. Changes authority of a current advisory committee, heavily weighted by child care industry members, so that its approval (consent power) of proposed child care regulations is no longer required prior to submission to the SC Legislature.

Tell Your Legislators

LWVSC believes that children's early years are their most important learning years. The excuse that there are no funds is not an adequate reason; these funds represent an investment in the social and economic health of our children, communities and state. The question isn't if but when we expend the funds - as an up-front investment that brings substantial current and future returns - or later for remedial programs, prisons, and welfare.

LWVSC supports S 815 but believes SC should expand 4K to all at-risk children by 2010 and that at-risk should be defined by income (School Lunch and Medicaid) and by disabilities that require

early education. As recommended by EOC, one state agency should administer 4K in schools and centers. LWVSC recommends SDE.

LWVSC supports S1004. Parents and children should be able to count on the state (DSS) to enforce regulations. They should not be victims of self-interested lobbyists. Remove consent power of the Advisory Committee on the Regulation of Childcare Facilities, reduce its industry representatives, and give DSS the ability and funds to enact fines and visit homes.