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Rep. Ari Porth Convenes State's First-Ever Early Childhood Caucus

~ Bipartisan group to examine best practice ways to prepare Florida's children for the future ~

TALLAHASSEE – Rep. Ari Porth (D-Broward) will host Florida's first-ever Early Childhood Caucus on Tuesday, Nov. 3, during interim committee week. The caucus, which is scheduled to start at noon in the House Majority Office, consists of a bipartisan group of more than 20 state legislators from both the House and Senate.

During the caucus, Florida lawmakers will hear from leading early childhood experts about the importance of investing early in Florida's children. Research proves that preparation for adulthood begins at the earliest stages of child development, between the ages of 0-5. "A strategic focus on early childhood development in Florida makes sense not only from a public policy standpoint, but also from fiscal, public safety and economic development perspectives," wrote Rep. Porth in a letter inviting legislators to the caucus.

In addition to hearing from early childhood experts, caucus members will learn about proposed legislation aimed at ensuring investments in children are a priority during the 2010 Legislative Session. Rep. Porth will share details on the "Protecting Florida's Most Vulnerable Citizens Act," which he is sponsoring along Sen. Nan Rich (D-Broward). The bill seeks to overhaul current state law to require caregivers for children and the elderly to complete their background checks before they begin work, and to close loopholes that have allowed felons to get jobs in daycare and nursing homes.

“Our caucus will address a range of policy issues,” said Rep. Porth, “including child health, quality child care, family strengthening, safe communities, screening and interventions for children with special needs, maximizing federal funding for early childhood initiatives, and more.

“I’m enthusiastic about this bipartisan effort to make a difference in the lives of our youngest Florida residents.”

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Legislators who have already joined the Early Childhood Caucus include:

House Members

Rep. Adam Fetterman (D-St. Lucie)

Rep. Betty Reed (D-Hillsborough)

Rep. Bill Heller (D- Pinellas)

Rep. Charles VanZant (R-Putnam)

Rep. Darren Soto (D-Orange)

Rep. Elaine Schwartz (D-Broward)

Rep. Janet Long (D-Pinellas)

Rep. Jim Frishe (R-Pinellas)

Rep. John Tobia (R-Broward)

Rep. Kevin Rader (D-Palm Beach)

Rep. Mark Pafford (D-Palm Beach)

Rep. Martin Kiar (D-Broward)

Rep. Michelle Rehwinkel Vasilinda (D-Leon)

Rep. Peter Nehr (R-Pinellas)

Rep. Rich Glorioso (R-Hillsborough)

Rep. Richard Steinberg (D-Miami-Dade)

Rep. Yolly Roberson (D-Miami-Dade)

Rep. Alan Williams (D-Leon)

Rep. Perry Thurston (D-Broward)

Rep Kelli Stargel (R-Polk)

Senate Members

Sen. Nan Rich (D-Broward)

Sen. Jeremy Ring (D-Broward)

Sen. Gary Siplin (D-Orange)

Sen. Eleanor Sobel (D-Broward)