

## **ADL Deplores House Action to Approve Religious Discrimination In Head Start**

New York, New York, September 22, 2005 ... The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) today sharply criticized the House of Representatives for its approval of an amendment to permit religious-based employment discrimination in the federally-funded Head Start early childhood development program.

"We strongly object to the action by the House to repeal existing civil rights protections in the historic Head Start anti-poverty educational development program," said Barbara B. Balser, ADL National Chair and Abraham H. Foxman, ADL National Director. Federally funded religious discrimination is always wrong, and to permit such discrimination in Head Start, an historic anti-poverty program universally acclaimed and present in so many communities across the country, is misguided and dangerous."

Since 1972, agencies that receive government funding for Head Start – including many religious organizations and houses of worship that currently host Head Start programs – have been prohibited from discriminating on the basis of religion when hiring or firing staff for positions within this federally funded program. The House-approved amendment repeals those civil rights protections, which were originally signed into law by President Richard Nixon and reaffirmed in every Head Start reauthorization bill since then – in 1984 and 1986 by President Ronald Reagan, in 1990 by President George H.W. Bush, and in 1994 and 1998 by President Bill Clinton.

"ADL recognizes and values the extraordinary role religious institutions have historically played in addressing many of our nation's most pressing social needs, as a critical complement to government-funded programs," said Ms. Balser and Mr. Foxman. "But we draw the line at government-funded religious discrimination. Faith-based organizations do not have a constitutionally protected right to use federal funds to discriminate on the basis of religion in government-funded positions.

"Along with our coalition allies in the religious, civil rights, and education communities, we will make every effort to defeat this religious discrimination amendment in the Senate Head Start reauthorization legislation."

