

Children Orphaned by AIDS Bill Passes House

Written by Robert ID2008

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On Tuesday Oct. 18th, the US House of Representatives passed a landmark initiative to help orphans and vulnerable children in developing countries. The bill is entitled, "The Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries Act of 2005" (HR 1409).

Congress is taking bold action on an issue that has moved the hearts of many Americans: the suffering of millions of children orphaned by the deadly AIDS epidemic and other causes. The bill was championed by Representatives Henry Hyde, Barbara Lee, and others, and had 130 cosponsors. It received strong backing from Global Action for Children.

"There is too much at stake for the United States to take a haphazard approach to the global crisis facing orphans and vulnerable children," said Rep. Lee. "This bill is an important step in creating a coordinated, more effective response to a crisis that impacts the futures of millions of the world's children."

"Prospects for Senate passage of a companion bill look good," noted Dr. Paul Zeitz, Executive Director of the Global AIDS Alliance. "That's great news for millions of children in poor countries."

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"I applaud the House for passing this bill, and I call on the Senate to follow suit," said The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church, USA. "This bipartisan legislation is an important step in fulfilling our nation's commitment to fighting the global HIV/AIDS pandemic and building a more sustainable future for all God's children."

The bill breaks new ground by requiring the Administration to develop a comprehensive strategy for meeting the needs of orphans and vulnerable children. It also establishes the position of Special Advisor for Orphans and Vulnerable Children within the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to better coordinate and provide assistance in support of basic care. When fully funded, the bill will help provide children with basic care and support, educational opportunities, and medical care, including AIDS treatment.

Among other innovations, the bill authorizes the US to help countries eliminate school fees. According to UNICEF, abolishing fees would help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Global Action for Children is a civic-engagement campaign to ensure comprehensive support for orphans and vulnerable children. The coalition includes major religious organizations, student groups, as well as groups focused on health and education (list at <http://www.globalactionforchildren.org>).