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CONTACT: Meghan Wedd McGuire
(803) 734-0479

General Assembly Passes First Steps Reauthorization *Legislation now ready for governor's signature*

Columbia, SC – Today, the South Carolina State House of Representatives voted unanimously to renew legislation that would allow First Steps to continue helping the state's youngest children prepare for school. Today's House action, and the January 17 passage of identical legislation in the Senate, sends the First Steps reauthorization bill to Governor Sanford for his signature.

"First Steps has a track record of providing targeted school readiness interventions to young children, starting at birth, and their families through public-private collaborations at the community level," said First Steps Director Susan DeVenny. "As we continue important discussions regarding Judge Cooper's ruling and expanded services for young children in poverty, South Carolinians are increasingly aware of the long-term benefits of quality early care and education. Helping parents prepare their children early for school success results in strong returns to our state's children and our economic future. Thanks to the House, we are a step closer to reaching those children and families who may benefit most from early learning opportunities."

The First Steps legislation, first approved by the General Assembly in 1999, is set to expire July 1st of next year unless reauthorized. The House legislation (H. 4406), cosponsored by 79 bipartisan representatives, would reauthorize First Steps until a sunset of July 1, 2013. Along with the previously passed Senate bill, the legislation will become law upon the signature of Governor Sanford.

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South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness ('First Steps') is a comprehensive, results-oriented statewide education initiative to help prepare children to reach school healthy and ready to succeed. Public and private support are combined through county partnerships to enable individual communities to address the unmet needs of young children and their families.

1300 Sumter Street • Concord Building, Suite 100 • Columbia, South Carolina 29201
Phone: 803-734-0479 • Fax: 803-734-1431 • Web site: www.scfirststeps.org