

Chairman Richard Shelby
US Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S-128
The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Patrick Leahy
US Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S-128
The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman Roy Blunt
US Senate Subcommittee on Labor
HHS Education Appropriations
Room S-128
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Patty Murray
US Senate Subcommittee on Labor
HHS Education Appropriations
Room S-128
Washington, D.C. 20510

September 26, 2019

Dear Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

The undersigned organizations representing educators, school board members, families, and students with disabilities write to urge the Committee to revise its Fiscal Year 2020 allocation for the Labor HHS Education Appropriations bill to provide a commensurate share of the budget cap increase, as offered in the amendment by Ranking Member Leahy. We also urge the Committee to provide no less than an additional \$1.05 billion for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for fiscal year 2020.

The proposed FY2020 allocation is simply inadequate to make the investments necessary to support the personnel, equipment, specialized instruction and supports on which students with disabilities rely through the IDEA. Furthermore, an allocation this low virtually guarantees the Senate will be able to only provide a freeze in funding for the IDEA in fiscal year 2020 (resulting in a cut due to inflation); rather than the substantial investment in this critical program in the House-passed bill. This FY2020 proposed allocation ensures that the federal government will draw no closer to fulfilling a pledge made in 1975, when IDEA became law, that it would provide forty percent of the excess costs of educating students with disabilities. **For yet another year, the federal government will fall woefully short of making good on its forty percent promise to fund the IDEA, providing in reality only about fourteen percent of that support.**

The Committee can and must do better than the proposed FY2020 allocation for students with disabilities to be able to receive specialized instruction designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. Freezing funding for the IDEA would fail to acknowledge increased costs faced by states and local school districts in meeting the needs of students with disabilities and does not factor in the growing number of students and those coming into the system with increasing needs. Over time, the increased costs of serving students with disabilities have resulted in an erosion of purchasing power and resources, which means that a funding freeze would actually equal a real-world funding decrease for the students who rely on IDEA. **According to the U.S. Department of Education, the average federal investment for each student educated through IDEA is approximately \$1,770 for Fiscal Year 2019, which would decline to \$1,758 in Fiscal Year 2020 if the program is essentially level-funded.** Additionally, the number of students served by IDEA is not trivial: the most recent estimate shows that 6.7 million PreK through 12th grade students receive services that are supported by Part B of IDEA.

For all of these reasons, we urge the Committee to think about the importance of appropriately funding IDEA and to rethink its current allocation level for the Labor HHS Education Appropriations bill in fiscal year 2020. The current allocation simply will not get the job done for students with disabilities, particularly since the federal government is in arrears on its past promises to support IDEA by approximately twenty-six percent.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Federation of Teachers
American Music Therapy Association
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
The Arc of the United States
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents
Association of School Business Officials International
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators
National Association of Private Special Education Centers
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Consortium for Physical Education for Individuals with Disabilities
National Disability Rights Network
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Action Committee
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
School Social Work Association of America