

Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

May 26, 2020

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of National PTA and our 3 million PTA members, we are writing to express our support for the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act (HEROES Act). National PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States with congresses in all 50 states, DC, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and Europe. Since 1897, National PTA has been a strong advocate and a reputable resource for empowering all families to effectively engage in their child's education.

The National PTA strongly supports the resources the bill would direct to K12 education and child nutrition and also the lack of any new waiver authority for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The financial needs of our public elementary and secondary schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic are enormous. The House's quick action to recognize the importance of funding our schools, protecting the rights of children with disabilities and correcting equitable participation requirements is very welcome to the parents and students our members work with daily. As this bill proceeds through the legislative process, we urge the adoption of additional resources to support parent engagement through the Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFEC) program and that the resources in the bill to support internet connectivity for our nation's school children be enhanced.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, K12 schools have worked diligently to move instruction online and face the possibility of having to at least partially continue online instruction when the new school year starts later this year. Our members, as well as superintendents, principals and teachers all across the country, have seen the challenges of transitioning to online instruction, with the lack of resources for teacher training and curriculum adaptation and new challenges in engaging families in the education of their children. When our nation's schools start in August and September for the new school year, students will have been out of their classrooms for over six months, creating

huge learning gaps and the need to catch students up while also ensuring they master the content required by the new school year.

These pressures, coupled with the challenges families are facing with lost jobs and stay at home orders, have intensified the importance of educating our nation's children. For this reason, National PTA and other leading education organizations wrote requesting \$175 billion in emergency COVID-19 response funding for K12 education. While the approximately \$55 billion that would be reserved for K12 education expenses is less than our request, we view this amount as a good additional investment that will have to be supplemented in the months to come. Likewise, we very much appreciate the \$1.5 billion provided to the Federal Communication Commission to provide Wi-Fi connectivity through our nation schools and libraries. Unfortunately, the amount provided in the HEROES Act will only begin to address the alarming "homework gap", or lack of internet access, being experienced by children of low-income families. We urge the adoption of at least \$4 billion for this program in a final bill that passes Congress.

The additional \$3 billion provided for child nutrition under this bill is also crucial to cover the costs of states and school food service authorities in providing healthy meals to our nation's school children. The extension of flexibility provided through earlier COVID-19 related packages has been significant to continuing to meet the nutritional needs of children across the country. The funds under this bill will ensure that states and school food service authorities will continue to utilize this flexibility to be able to meet these needs.

Coupled with these additional resources is the importance of providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for children with disabilities. The last COVID-19 package required the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to issue recommendations for waivers of statutory provisions of certain federal education laws, including IDEA. Fortunately, ED recognized the importance of maintaining FAPE and rejected the need for any new IDEA related authority. We are pleased that the HEROES Act follows this approach and does not contain any new IDEA waiver provisions. We are also pleased that states accepting State Fiscal Stabilization funding under the bill have to commit to continued rights for students with disabilities under IDEA.

Also critical are the bill's provisions that improve the requirements for equitable participation under the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) included as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Through erroneous guidance, ED has required school districts to reserve a higher percentage of ESF funding than is required under the actual statute for equitable services to private schools. The HEROES Act makes clear Congress' original intent to ensure that public schools have the resources they need to respond to COVID-19 related issues. We urge that any final bill include language which requires the use of 2019-2020 child counts as the basis of school district equitable participation requirements and ensure its retroactivity to the enactment date of the CARES Act.

As the legislative process on this bill continues, we urge the consideration of added funding for the Statewide Family Engagement Centers program. The SFEC program provides much needed assistance to foster meaningful engagement with families to further the academic and developmental progress of children. With the advent of COVID-19 and the need for many parents to step into the role of their child's teacher while instruction is online, family engagement has become even more critical than before. For these reasons we [wrote the appropriations committee](#) earlier this year asking for a one-time infusion of \$245.5 million to double the capacity of the existing SFEC grantees and ensure that every state has the benefit of and SFEC. With this letter we urge your further consideration of this request.

Thank you for your attention to our views on the HEROES Act. We look forward to continuing to work with Congress to identify the needs that our K12 schools, and the families that they serve, have during these trying times. Please contact Jacki Ball, Director of Government Affairs, at jball@PTA.org or (703) 518-1243 to answer any questions or provide further input as needed.

Sincerely,



Leslie Carrell Boggs
President
National PTA



Nathan R. Monell, CAE
Executive Director
National PTA

Cc: Chairman Roy Blunt, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Senate Subcommittee on Appropriations
Ranking Member Patty Murray, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related
Agencies Senate Subcommittee on Appropriations
Chair Rosa DeLauro, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
House Subcommittee on Appropriations
Ranking Member Tom Cole, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related
Agencies House Subcommittee on Appropriations
Chairman Lamar Alexander, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Ranking Member Patty Murray, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
Chairman Bobby Scott, House Committee on Education and Labor
Ranking Member Virginia Foxx, House Committee on Education and Labor