

March 24, 2017

Senator Thad Cochran
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Nita Lowey
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Roy Blunt
Chair, Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Tom Cole
Chair, House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Senate LHHS Appropriations
Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House LHHS Appropriations
Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Committee Members,

The undersigned organizations represent a coalition of education organizations dedicated to fulfilling the funding promise for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). On behalf of over 6.2 million students with disabilities, their teachers, paraeducators, specialized instructional support personnel, parents, school boards and administrators, we write to urge you to provide a significant increase in funding for IDEA in the FY2017 and FY18 LHHS-Education appropriations.

Since its inception in 1975, IDEA has protected students with disabilities by ensuring access to a free appropriate public education. At the time the statute was enacted, Congress promised to pay 40 percent of the National Average per Pupil Expenditure. While special education funding has received significant increases over the past 17 years, federal funding has leveled off recently and has even been cut. The closest the federal government has come to reaching its 40 percent commitment was 18 percent in 2005. This means that the President's proposed funding level for FY 18 is below that of more than a decade ago. The chronic underfunding of IDEA by the federal government places an additional funding burden on states, local school districts, and taxpayers to pay for needed services. This often means using local budget dollars to cover the federal shortfall, shortchanging other school programs that students with disabilities often also benefit from.

IDEA is currently funded at \$12.72 billion. This level funding equates to approximately 16 percent of what is historically considered the additional cost of educating students with disabilities, less than half of the 40 percent that was the federal government's original commitment to students with disabilities. We support prioritized and robust investment in IDEA, without negatively impacting funding for other education programs. We acknowledge the constraints that discretionary spending caps play in limiting federal investment in education and are committed to maintaining parity between defense and non-defense spending. It is vital that the non-defense discretionary and defense caps be raised by an equal amount to ensure that we have the resources necessary to ensure security and opportunity for students, their families, and our nation.

Our groups strongly support Congress prioritizing increased funding for IDEA and taking steps to ensure a significant increase for IDEA in the upcoming FY17 appropriations conversation, and using that appropriately adjusted funding level as the basis for further increased investment in FY18.

Investing in IDEA, a federal flagship formula program designed to help level the education playing field for students with disabilities, is an investment in our nation's students and their future. It indicates that Congress is serious in meeting its commitment to helping school districts support all students. Our organizations strongly support full federal funding for IDEA. IDEA is the major—but not sole—vehicle for providing education to students with disabilities. In fact, students with disabilities are general education students first, with nearly two-thirds of students with disabilities spending at least 80 percent of their time in a general education setting.

Thank you for your leadership on the full funding of IDEA, and we very much appreciate your work to support efforts in Congress to move toward meeting its IDEA funding commitment. Please direct any questions to Neil Snyder (nsnyder@asha.org) or Noelle Ellerson Ng (nellerson@aasa.org).

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Speech Language Hearing Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials, International
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Great City Schools
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association

Cc: Members of the Senate and House Appropriations Committees