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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

December 5, 2011

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The Honorable Hal Rogers
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The Honorable Norm Dicks
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
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The Honorable Denny Rehberg
Chair, Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Colleagues:

The undersigned would like to express our support for providing the largest possible increase for formula-driven education programs such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in the final FY2012 Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations bill. We believe that in this time of limited resources, we must prioritize funding for those programs that target predictable, proven assistance to areas of greatest need.

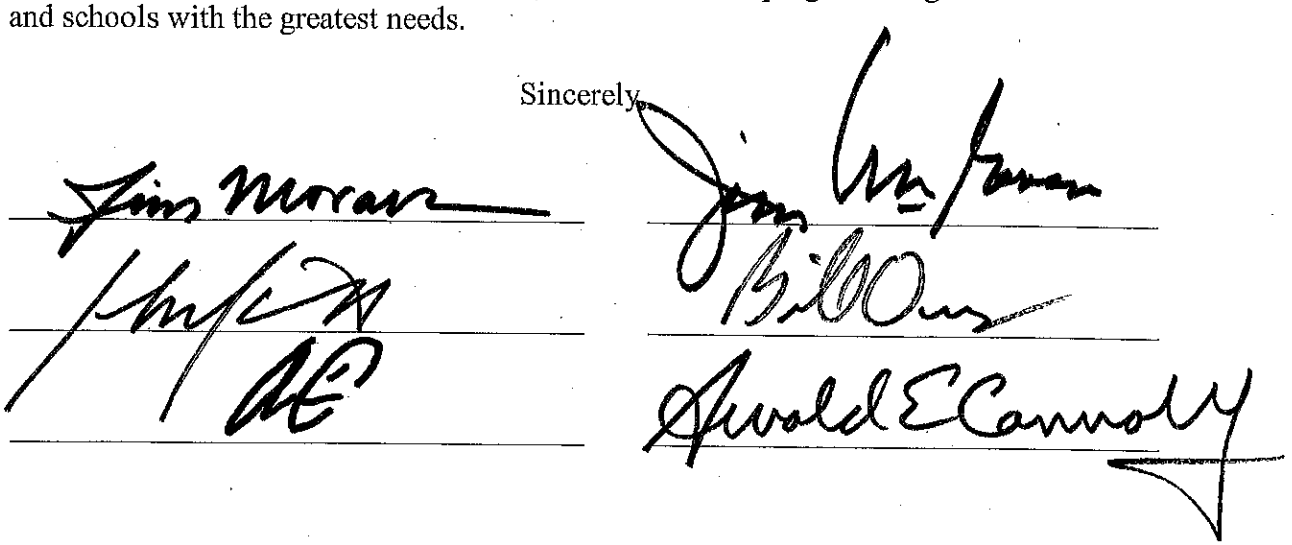
Core foundational programs such as Title I and IDEA are critical in providing necessary and sustained funds to schools serving disadvantaged students and special populations. We are pleased that the House draft bill provides increases to these programs.

- The proposed $1.2 billion increase for IDEA will help to ensure all students receive the services they need to succeed. Since the enactment of IDEA, the Federal Government has failed to live up to its commitment to pay 40 percent of the "excess" cost of educating a child with a disability, which means 40 percent of the national Average Per Pupil Expenditure of every child in special education. In fact, the current federal share is only 16.4 percent. Level funding in FY12 would actually result in a lowering of the federal share to 16.2 percent. The cumulative federal shortfall since the last IDEA reauthorization is more that $100 billion. This continued underfunding – in combination with current state fiscal crises – forces school districts to either raise taxes or dip into general education budgets to make up for the shortfall, thereby cutting other critical services. The proposed increase will help take pressure off of state and local budgets already stretched thin and free up funding for other priorities.

- Similarly, the $1 billion increase for Title I will make a real difference in helping to close achievement gaps. Title I was created to correct inequitable financing at the state and local level that results in fewer resources being devoted to lower-income students. While Title I has made a significant difference in addressing gaps in educational access and opportunity, many challenges remain as far too many students' success in school continues to depend in large part on the zip code where they live. According to First Focus, from 2008 to 2009, the number of America's children that live in poverty grew by close to 2 million. In 2009, child poverty reached a level of 20.7 percent – a rate of more than one in five and totaling more than 15.5 million children. This makes increased funding of Title I even more important, to ensure that all children have the supports they need to succeed.

While federal formula grant programs like Title I and IDEA are always important, they have never been more so than in today's difficult economic climate. Our priority must be to provide children in poverty with the essential resources needed for success. Formula-driven federal aid ensures that resources get to where they are needed the most, and offers stability in an otherwise volatile fiscal environment, particularly for high-need urban schools and small, rural districts. We urge you to focus our limited resources where they can do the most good – through formula-based programs targeted to students and schools with the greatest needs.

Sincerely,



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