

February 8, 2021

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

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy and Leaders McConnell, and Schumer,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to urge Congress to provide supplemental funding specifically targeted to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the next COVID relief package. This funding will strengthen K-12 special education, as well as IDEA Part C early intervention services for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Designed to help children from birth to 21 who have a developmental delay, disability, or health condition that may affect typical development and learning, these systems have faced serious challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Direct assistance is urgently needed in the COVID rescue package currently being debated by Congress.

To provide immediate assistance to K-12 schools, Congress created the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) through the CARES Act and continued the framework in the subsequent COVID-19 response package enacted in 2020. The ESF helped districts transition instructional and health-related special education services to virtual platforms, enabling safe social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding did not directly support the K-12 special education system, but did allow for innovation in their education delivery methods.

However, according to survey data from the Infant and Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA), no early intervention services (EIS) agency received supplemental funding from any response package.

Therefore, we urge Congress to provide \$12.5 billion in additional funding for the IDEA, including \$500 million for IDEA Part C and \$400 million for the IDEA Part B, Section 619 Preschool Program.

Given that the current situation renders much of our direct, in-person contact impossible, EIS agencies now face a unique set of challenges. The pandemic has made referral and identification of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with a disability or developmental delay far more difficult. Pediatricians or child care professionals are the individuals who most frequently refer children for EI services. As these visits are done virtually, additional ITCA data has shown it has proven difficult to recognize whether a child is experiencing delays.

The shift to virtual evaluation, assessment, and intervention has radically altered the very basics of early intervention and preschool special education. These services are now predominately delivered through teletherapy, increasing the reliance on technological platforms, necessitating adaptations to typical

procedures, and requiring far greater parent or guardian involvement. These changes bring additional, unexpected costs. Beyond the price of the technological aspect of teletherapy services, some providers also are shipping equipment and therapy supplies to and from caregivers for use during sessions. In certain instances, funding sources like Medicaid or private insurance that were available for in-person services are not available for virtual services.

These challenges make providing the full benefits of IDEA services difficult. Therefore, additional funding for IDEA Part C and preschool special education (Part B Section 619) is needed to address the current barriers to in-person interaction and service delivery.

Since its passage 45 years ago, the IDEA has provided children with disabilities and their families services and tools to support activities of daily living and overcome instructional barriers that impact access to educational success. In the K-12 environment, students with disabilities have gained real access to the general curriculum. The IDEA fundamentally changed how students with disabilities were educated, transforming our nation's schools. As the pandemic has forced our schools to transform once again, the IDEA is a powerful and effective tool to help students in this new reality.

IDEA Part C and Part B Section 619, provide funds that allow for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities and their families to access early intervention and special education services. These early childhood programs assist in minimizing the need for special education as children enter the K-12 system and maximize their potential for independent living later in life. The early years of a child's development are the most important, as significant brain development occurs during the first 3 years of life. Early intervention targets the developmental needs of infants and toddlers during this critical time when services are most effective at minimizing the disability or delay risk in physical, cognitive, communication, social or emotional, or adaptive development, and then helping the child successfully move to preschool and beyond. Preschool special education services offer important opportunities for young children to learn and grow and meet their developmental outcomes before they enter school.

With the additional funds for Part C and Part B Section 619, Congress can ensure that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with and at risk for disabilities, and their families, receive the services they need to live and learn as independently as possible, now and in the future. We are grateful for the prompt action taken so far related to special education and urge both chambers to include additional funding for Part C and preschool special education (Part B-Section 619) through the IDEA. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Sharon Walsh with DEC and ITCA (walshtaylo@aol.com) or Abe Saffer with AOTA (asaaffer@aota.org).

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Art Therapy Association
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
American Council for School Social Work
American Music Therapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association

American Psychological Association
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
American Therapeutic Recreation Association
Association of California School Administrators
Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents
Autism Society of America
Brain Injury Association of America
California School Boards Association
Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Closing the Women's Wealth Gap
Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council for Learning Disabilities
Council for Exceptional Children
Community Organizing & Family Issues
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
Easterseals
First 5 Association of California
First 5 California
The Greenlining Institute
IDEA Infant and Toddler Coordinators Association
Learning Disabilities of America
MomsRising
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Pupil Services Administrators
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Consortium for Physical Education for Individuals with Disabilities
National Down Syndrome Congress
New Leaders
School-Based Health Alliance
Start Early
WOMEN'S WAY
ZERO TO THREE

CC:

House:

The Honorable Bobby Scott, Chair
The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Ranking Member
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Chair
The Honorable Kay Granger
The Honorable Tom Cole, Ranking Member

Senate:

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair
The Honorable, Richard Burr, Ranking Member
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Chair
The Honorable, Richard Shelby Vice-Chair
The Honorable Roy Blunt, Ranking Member

