

March 28, 2025

The Honorable Bill Cassidy  
Chair, Senate Health, Education, Labor, and  
Pensions Committee  
219 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tim Walberg  
Chair, Committee on Education and  
Workforce  
US. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Ranking Member  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and  
Pensions Committee  
219 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scot  
Ranking Member, Committee on Education  
and Workforce  
US. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

**Dear Chairs Cassidy and Walberg, and Ranking Members Sanders and Scott:**

On behalf of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), I am writing to express our strong support for the Department of Education's (ED) mission of supporting the national public education system that supports the whole child and fostering environments where every student can thrive, regardless of ability or background.

This year marks a milestone in federal education policy, with the 50th anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the 60th anniversary of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). These historic laws have affirmed a powerful truth: every student with a disability is a general education student first. Congress has reinforced this principle through successive reauthorizations of IDEA and ESEA, promoting policies that foster collaboration between the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). We call on Congress to protect ED's role and strengthen its capacity to support and fulfill the promise of these landmark laws.

The Department of Education plays a vital role in protecting states' rights by supporting, rather than directing, state and local education systems. By preserving their primary authority over curriculum, instruction, and governance, ED empowers states to shape education according to local needs while ensuring federal standards are upheld. Furthermore, ED serves as a critical hub for innovation and continuous improvement. By translating successful practices into nationally accessible tools and guidance, the Department enables even the smallest and most under-resourced districts to benefit from innovations happening nationwide.

AOTA is the national professional association representing the interests of more than 235,000 occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and students of occupational therapy. The practice of occupational therapy is science-driven, evidence-based, and enables people of all ages to live life to its fullest by promoting health and minimizing the functional effects of illness, injury, and disability. About one-third of all occupational therapy practitioners work in public schools under IDEA and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Occupational therapy practitioners provide a continuum of services and supports to students and personnel.

While AOTA does not view the Department of Education as perfect or beyond improvement, we strongly support its irreplaceable role in the effort to prepare all children to be productive, well-educated citizens. Occupational therapy practitioners provide services in both educational and health care settings, and AOTA has worked with both ED and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for decades to ensure people have access to occupational therapy services across these settings. From this experience, AOTA recognizes that there is a distinct difference between the healthcare focus and expertise of HHS, and the educational focus and expertise of ED. Both are critical to meeting the needs of people with illness, injury, or disability.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Katie Jordan', is centered below the word 'Sincerely,'.

Katie Jordan, OTD, OTR/L, FAOTA  
Chief Executive Officer  
American Occupational Therapy Association

CC:

The Honorable Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries, House Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Honorable John Thune, Senate Majority Leader, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Chuck Schumer, Senate Minority Leader, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Tom Cole, Chair, House Appropriations Committee  
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee  
The Honorable Susan Collins, Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee  
The Honorable Patty Murray, Vice Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee  
Committee Members of House Education & Workforce, House Appropriations, Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, and Senate Appropriations.