

May 13, 2020

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

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

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

The Honorable Charles Schumer
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 specific, targeted support to early intervention services (EIS) and special education for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities as part of any additional funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the next COVID-19 legislative package. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided some much needed funding through the Education Stabilization Fund to assist K-12 school districts transition instructional and health-related special education services to virtual platforms, enabling safe social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, with significant needs for school-aged students, these funds were not nearly adequate for preschool special education needs. In addition, because the education agency in only ten states is responsible for operating the EIS program, the vast majority of states received no assistance for Part C early intervention services. We believe that the CARES Act did not sufficiently address the challenges IDEA early childhood providers also face during this national crisis since their services are generally provided in the child's home or in community settings.

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.

Since the passage of IDEA 45 years ago, children with disabilities have received services and tools to overcome instructional barriers, as well as in activities of daily living 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.

The CARES Act provided \$13.5 billion dollars to schools, helping all K-12 students access virtually the general curriculum and specialized instructional support services. However, Congress did not address efforts to support and strengthen early intervention or preschool services under the IDEA in the CARES Act. Such services are vital to infants, toddlers and, preschoolers with disabilities or those at risk of developing a substantial developmental delay without intervention and may ultimately result in cost savings for children who need less intensive special education services later on.

Given the current situation, where nearly all in-person contact is impossible, it is especially challenging for medically fragile children to receive in-person services. The shift to virtual care has radically altered the very basics of early intervention and, preschool special education. For these young children who receive IDEA services, these services are now predominately delivered through teletherapy, increasing the reliance on technological platforms and far greater parent or guardian involvement. This shift brings additional, unexpected costs. Beyond the price of the technological aspect of teletherapy, some providers also are shipping equipment and supplies to and from parents for use during sessions. In some instances, funding sources like Medicaid or private insurance that were available for in person services are not available for teleservices.

There are other challenges for those children yet to be identified as needing IDEA services. Pediatricians or other providers are the most likely individuals to refer children for services. As these visits are done virtually, it may be more difficult to recognize that a child is experiencing delays. Conducting evaluation to determine eligibility is also a significant challenge. These challenges make achieving the full benefits of IDEA services difficult. If these young children fail to receive early childhood IDEA services, more services may ultimately be needed. Therefore, additional funding for IDEA Part C and preschool special education (Part B Section 619) are needed to address the current barriers to in-person contact.

IDEA Part C and Part B, Section 619 provide funds which allow for infants and toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities 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 the 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 a child's first 3 years. EIS target the developmental needs of infants and toddlers when it is most effective, addressing the disability or delay risk in physical, cognitive, communications, social or emotional, or adaptive development and then help the child successfully move to preschool and beyond. Preschool special education services offer important opportunities for young children to learn and grow and to meet their developmental outcomes before they enter school.

With the additional funds for Part C and Part B, Section 619, Congress can ensure current and future infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with, and at risk for, disabilities receive the services they need to live and learn as independently as possible. 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 IDEA. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Sharon Walsh with DEC and ITCA (walshtaylo@aol.com) or Abe Saffer with AOTA (asaffer@aota.org).

Sincerely,

American Council for School Social Work
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American Psychological Association
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Arc of the United States
Association of California School Administrators
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
California School Boards Association

Center for Law and Social Policy
Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council for Exceptional Children
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
Easterseals
First 5 California
First 5 LA
IDEA infant Toddler Coordinators Association
Jewish Federations of North America
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Muslim Caucus Education Collective
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Women's Law Center
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
New Leaders
Parents as Teachers
Ounce of Prevention Fund
SchoolHouse Connection
School Social Work Association of America
ZERO TO THREE

CC:

House:

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

Senate:

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