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April 29, 2021

Chairwoman Patty Murray  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
And Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Roy Blunt  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
And Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro  
House Appropriations Subcommittee  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
And Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Tom Cole  
House Appropriations Subcommittee  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
And Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chair DeLauro, and Ranking Member Cole:

On behalf of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), a professional association of 22,000 educators dedicated to advancing the success of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents, I urge you to prioritize programs that impact students with exceptionalities as you develop your priorities for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022.

A healthy federal investment in programs that support students with exceptionalities is critical to ensuring that children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents thrive in school and beyond. Unfortunately, these programs are consistently and woefully underfunded, straining the entire education system including local schools. CEC has been a longstanding, leading voice in support of full funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Fully funding IDEA would ensure that infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities are provided access to educators trained to provide specially designed instruction, intervention, support, curricula, devices, and related services that allow them to meet the highest possible outcomes. Fully funding IDEA also ensures access to and support for learning and a quality of life that respects dignity, culture, language, and background.

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant challenges to the education system. To fully recover from the pandemic in a sustainable manner, schools and districts will need the meaningful and significant investments promised to them to fully support infants, toddlers, children, and youth with exceptionalities, many of whom have been disproportionately impacted over the last year. Schools and districts will especially need sustained investments in the educator pipeline to reverse the special educator shortage crisis, which has been amplified by COVID-19.

Thus, CEC respectfully requests support the following for FY 2022:

**IDEA Part B State Grants (Sec. 611) – Invest no less than \$15.5 billion:**

Over seven million school-aged students, approximately 14% of the total student enrollment, benefit from individualized special education and related services mandated by IDEA. The law requires that schools tailor these to meet the specific needs of each child. With the enactment of IDEA came a Federal government pledge to pay 40% of the excess cost of educating a student with a disability, what is



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referred to as IDEA full funding. Unfortunately, in FY 2021, through regular appropriations, the Federal share was approximately 13%, leaving states and school districts to pay the balance. This causes great strain on education systems, which are forced to make difficult budget decisions to make up for the Federal shortfall. The Biden Administration's topline budget proposal for FY 2022 puts IDEA on the first step of a 10-year glidepath to full funding by providing \$15.5 billion for Section 611, carrying forward an emergency appropriation of \$2.6 billion for the program through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP). This important increase would also enable states and districts to provide long-term investments, namely in personnel, with their ARP dollars, knowing those investments will be sustained in FY 2022.

**IDEA Part C - Invest \$732 million; IDEA Part B Section 619 - Invest \$598 million:**

IDEA's early childhood programs serve over 1 million infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities and their families through Part C and Part B Section 619, respectively. Over the last twenty years, both programs have increased the number of children served by approximately 50% and proven that this early intervention leads to improved outcomes. Despite this growth and positive outcomes for children, federal funding has failed to keep pace. In fact, the federal cost per child has decreased by 40% over the same period. ARP provided a one-time infusion of funds to both programs for FY 2021, for which CEC is grateful. We seek a meaningful increase for FY 2022 that would put these programs on their own glidepaths to full funding, providing a long-term impact on early childhood programs.

**IDEA Part D personnel preparation (Sec. 662) - Invest \$300 million:**

Special education was the highest educator shortage area in nearly all states before the pandemic struck and is the area that has endured the highest rate of job cuts during the pandemic. This shortage crisis must be addressed through a significant increase to Part D Sec. 662, which helps increase the number of qualified personnel with the skills and knowledge necessary to support infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities, including support during the critical early years of a special educator's career.

**NCSER - Invest \$70 million:**

The National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER), within the Institute of Education Sciences is the primary driver of special education research in the nation and provides evidence-based practices for classroom teachers. NCSER is also now faced with investigating a suite of new research areas specifically related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on special education which will serve as critical, informative resources as educators, schools, and districts begin to address the disproportionate impact the pandemic has placed on infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

**Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Grants - Invest \$32 million:**

The Javits Act seeks to address the "excellence gap" that exists at the top achievement levels between minority and white students and between low-income students and their more advantaged peers. The Javits Act supports research and development to better identify and serve high-ability students from underserved backgrounds so they can thrive.

As you determine your priorities for FY 2022, I urge you to work with your colleagues to grow public school funding, and specifically increase funding for special and gifted education programs. The backing of increased investments in formula-funded education programs such as the IDEA will support our



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nation's infants, toddlers, children, and youth to reach their full potential. Please make the education of children with exceptionalities a top investment.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Cavitt", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dennis Cavitt, Ed.D.

President

Council for Exceptional Children