

May 2, 2019

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Van Hollen,

I am writing on behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal budget and policy decisions, to thank you for introducing the Keep Our Promise to America's Children and Teachers Act (Keep Our PACT Act) (S.1172).

As the bill states, children are our nation's greatest treasure and future and ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to receive a high-quality education should be one of our top priorities. Part A, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as well as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) special education grants serve our nation's neediest students and work to narrow the education gap that exists in our country. Unfortunately, funding for these programs consistently falls woefully short of meeting the true needs of these students.

According to the Congressional Research Service, full funding for Title I is determined by the Basic Grant Formula within Part A, which is based on the number of Title I-eligible children, the average per-pupil cost of education in a given state, and the percentage of the state's per-pupil cost that Congress will fund.¹ Title I was written so that the federal government pays about 40 cents on the dollar for educational services provided to eligible children. In 2017 alone, the National Education Association estimates that full funding for Title I would have been about \$48.7 billion, making the \$15.5 billion that was appropriated a shortfall of over \$33 billion.² Furthermore, this trend is only getting worse due to inflation and the growing number of Title I-eligible children.

Similarly, IDEA grants have never received full funding for meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Educating children with disabilities, on average, costs twice as much as educating other children, and IDEA was created to help offset this cost. When the law was originally passed in 1975, the federal government promised to cover 40 percent of this excess cost. Congress later changed the law to mandate that the federal government only had to pay up to 40 percent. Now, IDEA funding has withered to the point where the federal government pays less than half, or roughly 18 percent of the total cost, of what they originally promised in 1975, according to the National Council on Disability.³

The Keep Our PACT Act would correct these unfortunate trends in Title I and IDEA funding by ensuring full funding for these crucial programs over the next decade. This funding increase would have profound impacts on low-income and disabled students that will, in turn, help create a better future for our country.

¹ "Title I Funding Gap," National Education Association, 4 April 2018. <https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Title-I-Funding-Gap-FY2017-with-State-Table.pdf>. Accessed 1 May 2019.

² Ibid, 1.

³ "Broken Promises: The Underfunding of IDEA," National Council on Disability, 7 February 2018. https://ncd.gov/sites/default/files/NCD_BrokenPromises_508.pdf. Accessed 1 May 2019.

Studies show that spending increases in low-income schools, over the long run, lead to higher performance in reading and math, higher college graduation rates, and higher earnings as adults.⁴ Likewise, the IDEA program has transformed education for students with disabilities from disabled children being barred from public education to having graduation rates approaching those of their peers. Providing full funding for this program would continue to give these students a fighting chance.

We are grateful for your leadership in making children's education a legislative priority and we look forward to working with you on this and other proposals to improve the well-being of children and youth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent "L" and "y".

Bruce Lesley
President

⁴ Dynarski, Mark, "It's Not Nothing: The Role of Money in Improving Education," Brookings Institution, 2 March 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/its-not-nothing-the-role-of-money-in-improving-education/>. Accessed 1 May 2019.