

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 16, 2015

The Honorable Tom Price, M.D.
Chairman
Committee on the Budget
207 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget
207 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Price and Ranking Member Van Hollen:

As you write the fiscal year (FY) 2016 Budget Resolution, we request the budget begin addressing the urgent needs of special needs children, their families, and their educators. We request the FY 2016 Budget Resolution include a priority for funding for Part B of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) within budget function 500. We request the House budget include provisions that would ensure the federal government's contribution to special education reaches 18 percent, matching the highest level of sustained support provided by Congress, while maintaining the overall spending levels for function 500.

In 1975, Congress mandated educational access and services for students with special needs, with the promise that significant federal investments would support states and school districts in meeting their obligations to these children. The precursor to IDEA, the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, authorized federal funding up to 40 percent of the additional cost of educating students with disabilities. Unfortunately, federal contributions have never approached that goal.

Congress did make significant progress toward this goal in fiscal years 1995 through 2005. Part B funding during those years more than doubled the federal contribution to the cost of educating students with disabilities, from under 8 percent to more than 18 percent. Regrettably, the last decade has brought steady decreases in the federal contribution. In FY 2015, the federal government is covering just 16 percent of the national average per pupil expenditure.

This decline in funding has profound consequences for children with disabilities and their peers. School districts struggle to offer special needs students the necessary placements, supports, and services they deserve. General education budgets are cut to make up the shortfall. The attached chart highlights this reality.

Although our request still falls short of the federal government's commitment to special needs children, it would generate significant new resources for all states and school districts, giving policymakers and educators more freedom to use state and local funds to strengthen general and special education in their communities.

As our nation struggles with debt levels that have eclipsed the size of the entire U.S. economy, it is now more important than ever to set responsible priorities. We must stop wasting taxpayer

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dollars on new and ineffective programs and instead work toward meeting our basic obligation to ensure special needs children are prepared for success after high school. We urge you to renew Congress' commitment to these students, their families, and their educators.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and continued commitment to this effort. We stand ready to work with you in this invaluable endeavor.

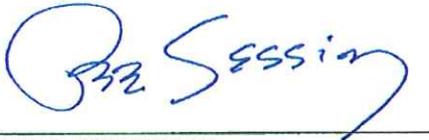
Sincerely,



JOHN KLINE
Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce



CATHY McMORRIS RODGERS
Chair
House Republican Conference



PETE SESSIONS
Chairman
Committee on Rules



LAMAR SMITH
Chairman
Committee on Science, Space, and
Technology

Enclosure