

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 16, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy,

As you consider future relief or stimulus packages in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, we write to urge your support for including a robust increase in appropriations for the IDEA Part C program for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families and the IDEA Part B Section 619 preschool program. This funding is vital to support and strengthen early intervention services (EIS) and special education for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We thank you for the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which provided much needed funding through the Education Stabilization Fund, assisting K-12 school districts to transition instructional and health-related special education services to virtual platforms. However, the CARES Act did not directly address the challenges early childhood providers face during this national crisis, including those whose services are generally provided in the child's home or in community settings.

Since the passage of IDEA 45 years ago, children with disabilities have received services to overcome instructional barriers, as well as tools for achieving developmental and instructional outcomes that impact opportunities for educational success. In the K-12 environment, students with disabilities have gained real access and opportunity to participate and succeed in 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 children and youth with disabilities in this new reality.

In addition to the critical role IDEA plays in K-12 education for students with disabilities, IDEA Part C and Part B, Section 619 provide funds which allow 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. Early intervention services for infants and toddlers target disabilities or delays in physical, cognitive, communications, social or emotional, or adaptive development at the time when those services are most effective in helping the child successfully move to preschool. Preschool special education services offer important opportunities for young children to learn and grow and to enhance developmental outcomes making it more likely they can succeed when they enter school.

However, the funds appropriated in the CARES Act were inadequate to also address early intervention and special education needs. School districts have significant needs related to COVID-19 that span children from preschool through K-12. In fact, since in only ten states the state education agency is responsible for operating the EIS program, the vast majority of states received no assistance at all for Part C early intervention services. Early intervention and special education 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.

Given the current situation, where nearly all in-person contact is impossible, it is especially challenging for very young and medically fragile children to receive in-person services. The shift to virtual services has radically altered the very basics of early intervention and preschool special education. Services are now predominately delivered through teletherapy, increasing the reliance on virtual platforms and requiring far greater parent or guardian involvement. This shift brings additional unexpected costs. This includes the prices associated with the technological aspect of teletherapy, as well as providers who may be shipping equipment and supplies to and from parents for use during sessions. In some instances, funding sources like Medicaid that were available for in person services have had to be renegotiated to be used for virtual services.

There are potentially additional challenges for young children who may need IDEA services, but have not yet been referred. Pediatricians or other providers are the most likely individuals to refer children for services. However, with virtual medical visits and preschoolers not in direct contact with teachers, it may be more difficult to recognize that a child should be referred for IDEA evaluation. In some instances, conducting evaluations to determine eligibility are also a significant challenge since these are now occurring in virtual settings. Delays in getting services to young children present additional risks to their successful development. As in person services are beginning across the country, there will be additional costs in protective equipment to ensure the health and safety of families and providers. Additional funding for IDEA Part C and preschool special education (Part B Section 619) is needed to address the current and anticipated challenges in the identification and provision of services.

Additional funds for Part C and Part B, Section 619 are critical to ensure that eligible infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with, and at risk for, disabilities receive the services they need

to successfully meet their outcomes. Thank you in advance for considering this important request as you continue the important work of providing response and recovery relief during these difficult times.

Sincerely,



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Rodney Davis
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
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