March 28, 2019

Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Tom Cole
House Appropriation Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As your Subcommittee considers Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations, we urge you to maintain at least level funding for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant program administered by the Department of Education, authorized in the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA). IAL provides competitive awards to school libraries as well as national not-for-profit organizations, including partnerships that reach families outside of local education agencies (LEAs), to support children and families in high-need, underserved communities. By providing age-appropriate books, supporting parental engagement programs, and reinforcing professional development, the IAL program helps to support literacy skills to ensure that children enter school ready to learn and best positioned for success.

Since its inception in Fiscal Year 2012, 166 IAL grants have been awarded to national non-profit organizations and school districts across every region of the US. Some examples of IAL grant activities include:

Local Education Agencies-

- A recent award for the book distribution and literacy support program through the Texas Education Service Center, Region 20, will build student literacy skills for children birth through fifth grade. Region 20 received a 2018 IAL grant which will support teacher professional development, in-school library materials, and book distribution focusing on family engagement activities. Texas has a high percentage of its fourth graders that read below a proficient level. This IAL award will help create a model that schools across the state can use to improve their literacy proficiency ratings.

National Non-Profit Organizations-

- Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) used IAL funds to support 33,000 students across 31 schools districts with books and literacy resources to explore a model that drives summer reading outcomes by supporting students, teachers and families. Fifty-seven percent of
the students involved in the study showed gains in reading proficiency over the summer. RIF was also part of an IAL project with the Kentucky Education Development Corporation to support participating schools through access to books, resources and training resulting in improved student performance in literacy.

- Reach Out and Read (ROR) and Save the Children partnered to engage schools, families and the pediatric primary care providers in creating literacy-rich environments for more than 40,000 children in rural areas of Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky and South Carolina. Several school districts in Texas (Southwest, Charlotte, Cuero, Brownsville ISDs) and Oklahoma (Idabel) have incorporated the Reach Out and Read model in recent IAL projects to integrate pediatric providers in literacy promotion activities. By partnering with the healthcare professionals, communities are able to reach children during the earliest years of life, ensuring that parents learn how reading, singing and rhyming help facilitate healthy brain development and language acquisition, starting at birth.

Access to high-quality literacy programming and resources remains a critical component of childhood literacy. For American families living in poverty and limited to the services of high-need local educational authorities, lack of access to quality reading materials and adequate learning facilities is prohibitive, fostering chronic disadvantages for already underserved youth. Without critical literacy support, students often fall behind in school and struggle to thrive in the workforce.

The 114th Congress took important steps in supporting the needs of disadvantaged students by providing IAL authorization through the passage of ESSA and funding through appropriations since 2012. From Alaska, to New York, and Kentucky to California, this important appropriation provides funding for initiatives that include book distribution, early literacy services, technological integration and support for literacy activities, professional development for educators, culturally responsive literacy workshops for parents/families, and effective school library programs.

We ask you to maintain, or increase, this investment in the Fiscal Year 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Member of Congress  

Don Young  
Member of Congress  

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress
Jahana Hayes  
Member of Congress

Lizzie Fletcher  
Member of Congress

Salud O. Carbajal  
Member of Congress

Bradley S. Schneider  
Member of Congress

Tulsi Gabbard  
Member of Congress

Ron Kind  
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Darren Soto  
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Pramila Jayapal  
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Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

Ilhan Omar  
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Jimmy Gomez  
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Elissa Slotkin  
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Jennifer González-Colón  
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano  
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Member of Congress

TJ Cox  
Member of Congress