Dear Chairman Kingston and Ranking Member DeLauro,

As your Subcommittee considers the Fiscal Year 2015 Appropriations bill for the Department of Education, we urge you to maintain the investment in the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant program under the Fund for the Improvement of Education. IAL provides competitive awards to school libraries and national not-for-profit organizations, including partnerships that reach families outside of local educational agencies, for providing books and childhood literacy activities to children and families in high need communities. The program also supports parental engagement and focuses on promoting student literacy from birth through high school.

The importance of this grant program was recognized when $28.6 million was first appropriated for IAL in FY12 and most recently in FY14 when $25 million was directed to the initiative. In September, 2012, the U.S. Department of Education awarded two-year IAL grants to 46 nonprofit organizations and school districts in 21 states and the District of Columbia.

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) is one such grantee and their IAL initiative has significantly increased low-income children’s access to high quality books in impoverished communities nationwide and served as a critical intervention to stem students’ loss of reading achievement over the summer. In one south Texas community, the books distributed through RIF’s project are the only books that students receive and read over the summer. In this RIF IAL project, the organization successfully increased parent participation, which allowed students to make their first trip to the local library that only 10 percent of the children had visited before. With IAL support, RIF’s initiative also allowed these students to visit the International Museum of Arts & Science, which expanded upon the Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) content in the RIF books that the kids received. Providing robust funding for IAL in FY15 will ensure the continuation of this successful grant program.

Another such grantee was the Lowndes County Public Schools in Alabama. The Lowndes Schools received an IAL grant in 2012 and is leveraging the award to help implement the Transforming School Libraries to Facilitate a Culture of Learning (TSLFCL) goal in their schools. The funding has been used to update their school library materials including books, e-readers, computers, and other such materials that are necessary for a state of the art school library. Lowndes Schools has increased the number of their library reading materials that are checked out by 63 percent. In addition, the e-readers that were purchased with grant funds have
provided students with simultaneous access to popular titles so the wait time for high-demand books has been eliminated. Their grant has also been used to open the school libraries on weekends and provide professional development for the district’s school librarians.

Ensuring children’s access to books is a critical component of our nation’s effort to promote life-long learning and remains a key aspect of early childhood literacy. For American families living in poverty, access to reading materials is severely limited. Children living in poverty have fewer books in their homes than their peers, and this unfortunate reality hinders their ability to prepare for school and stay on track. We also recognize the importance of effective school library programs in promoting literacy and advancing student achievement.

Congress has taken an important step in supporting the needs of disadvantaged students by providing IAL funding for book distribution, early literacy services, and effective school library programs. We ask that you maintain this investment in the FY15 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

Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress

John Yarmuth
Member of Congress

Corrine Brown
Member of Congress

John Lewis
Member of Congress

Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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Rush Holt  
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Member of Congress

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Jim McDermott  
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney  
Member of Congress

Albio Sires  
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Wm. Lacy Clay  
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Ron Kind  
Member of Congress

Tony Cardenas  
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Emanuel Cleaver II  
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Member of Congress
André Carson  
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Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

Diana DeGette  
Member of Congress

Joseph P. Kennedy III  
Member of Congress

Marcia L. Fudge  
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John P. Sarbanes  
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Steve Cohen  
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Gregory W. Meeks  
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Emanuel Cummings  
Member of Congress

John Conyers Jr.  
Member of Congress

Gene Green  
Member of Congress
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