

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 8, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair, Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education, and  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
122 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education, and  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
115 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

As your Subcommittee considers Fiscal Year 2022 appropriations, we respectfully request a total of \$50 million for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant program administered by the Department of Education, authorized in the Every Student 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 educational 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 U.S., delivering critical literacy resources in these communities. In light of interrupted learning this past year due to the pandemic, it is even more urgent to support children's literacy at home and in school. While the challenges of the last year have negatively impacted the reading proficiency of many students, it is particularly acute for minority and low-income students. The IAL program is designed to provide the kind of support children and families need, through library programs that have been a digital literacy lifeline to community-based program and partnerships with primary health care providers to ensure that families can support literacy development at home. Some examples of IAL grant activities include:

#### *Local Education Agencies and School Libraries-*

- Lane Elementary School in Atoka County, OK, with nearly 260 students is a majority American Indian school. Lane used its IAL grant to update library resources including providing more Native-American specific books and wireless reading devices, working with parents to support reading at home, providing children with books to keep for their home libraries, and enabling teachers and library staff to collaborate to improve classroom instruction.

*National Non-Profit Organizations-*

- Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) used IAL funds to support 33,000 students across 31 school districts with books and literacy resources to study the effectiveness of a model to improve 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 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 and Oklahoma have incorporated the Reach Out and Read model in recent IAL projects to integrate pediatric providers in literacy promotion activities. By partnering with health care 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, the 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 achieve their full potential.

Congress has taken an important step in supporting the needs of underserved students by providing IAL funding for book distribution, early literacy services, and effective school library programs. We ask you to provide \$50 million in funding for this important investment in the Fiscal Year 2022 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,



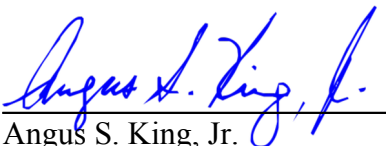
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Jack Reed  
United States Senator




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Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



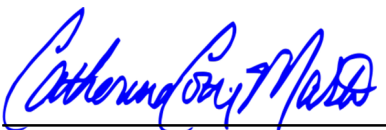
Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



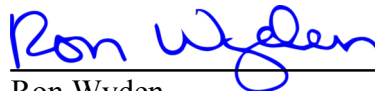
Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



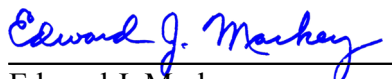
Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



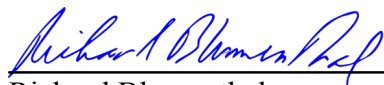
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Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



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Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



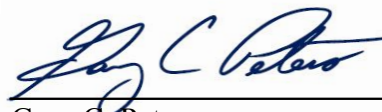
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Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



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Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator



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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



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Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



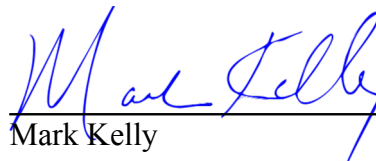
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Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



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Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



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Raphael G. Warnock  
United States Senator



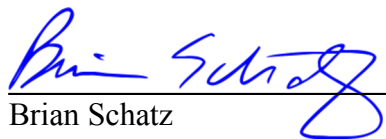
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Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator



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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



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Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



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Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



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Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator