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Member
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Council of Chief State School Officers, representing the nation's state commissioners and superintendents of education, I write to urge the Conference Committee to accept the higher funding levels for Function 500 education programs approved in the Senate budget resolution. The resolution would provide the resources necessary to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to learn and achieve success.

Congress made a commitment to improving education for all children, particularly the most disadvantaged students when it passed the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, yet the House Budget Resolution recommends cutting funding for these programs below the President's FY2004 budget request by \$2.1 billion. Reform without adequate resources is an empty promise. Already states face severe budget deficits totaling \$80 billion nationally, forcing the majority of states to make cuts in their K-12 spending. A substantial investment in education will make a real difference in the classroom.

The cornerstone of NCLB is the Title I program for disadvantaged students. The program is one of the most flexible sources of funding for schools and if adequately funded could be the foundation for nationwide school improvement. With funding for only one-third of eligible students, Title I is not yet positioned to help move all students toward proficiency and close the achievement gap.

In addition to funding for disadvantaged students, Congress must keep its commitment to funding programs for students with disabilities. We applaud the work Congress has done in recent years to move toward meeting their commitment, however there is a long way to go before the federal government has met its obligation of full funding. Lastly, we are supportive of restoring funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers and the Rural Education Achievement Program. These programs provide educational opportunities for students that are vital to the success of No Child Left Behind.

Again, we urge you to support the Senate proposed education funding levels for FY2004. As always, thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Patricia Sullivan
Deputy Executive Director
Division of Advocacy & Strategic Alliances

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