



The New Jersey Coalition for Special Education Funding Reform

May 19, 2010

The Honorable Rush Holt
1214 Longworth House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

Dear Congressman Holt:

The New Jersey Coalition for Special Education Funding Reform is comprised of ten statewide organizations concerned with the education of children with disabilities. Since 1996, the group has continuously monitored policy issues affecting special education funding in New Jersey.

We seek a special education funding mechanism that is adequate, efficient, equitable, predictable, flexible, transparent, fully placement-neutral, and accountable for both spending and student outcomes. The Coalition believes that state policy must be informed by objective data in areas such as funding, costs and best practice.

We are writing to you to express deep concerns about draconian cuts to aid for special education in New Jersey. Governor Christie has proposed cutting state support for special education to some districts to zero, and plans to reduce overall state effort by more than \$300M.

While the Coalition and its members recognize New Jersey's dire budget situation, and support the State's need to address budget shortfalls, the proposed education budget hits students with disabilities particularly hard. A grossly disproportionate share of the cuts to education –nearly 30% - comes from reductions in the State's commitment to support special education.

We have heard from parents and school professionals that districts are responding to these anticipated cuts through illegal and harmful steps, such as eliminating all Extended School year programs; changing IEP-driven related services (speech therapy, physical therapy); eliminating paraprofessional support; and, bringing whole groups of students to in district programs – all without consideration of individual need.

Moreover, we believe that these dramatic cuts violate the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provision that requires states, at a minimum, to maintain their special education fiscal efforts from one year to the next.

If these cuts are approved by our state legislature - and it is likely that they will be - the Christie administration will need to request a waiver from the federal government. To our knowledge, no such waiver has yet been requested. This in and of itself problematic, as local districts have been forced to operate as if the state's budget cuts are already in effect in order to comply with state timelines for district budget submissions.

Should New Jersey request a waiver to the IDEA 'maintenance of effort' provisions, we ask that you ensure that the U.S. Department of Education seriously consider the implications of granting such a request, and very carefully scrutinize the merits of the request to ensure that New Jersey demonstrates that it can guarantee the continued provision of appropriate special education services across the state.

We would be happy to meet with you and your staff to discuss our concerns in further detail.

Thank you.

Brenda Considine
For the New Jersey Coalition for Special Education Funding Reform

Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities (ABCD)
The Arc of New Jersey
ASAH, formerly the Association for Schools and Agencies for the Handicapped
Association for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ)
Disability Rights New Jersey
Education Law Center
New Jersey Speech-Language-Hearing Association
New Jersey Special Education Practitioners
Special Education Leadership Council
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)