Sample letter to Congress: IDEA funding/COVID

Dear Representative / Senator _________:
As a school board member in [your district, Kansas], I am writing to urge you to support both additional funding and flexibility for IDEA in the upcoming supplemental relief package. Schools are working hard to provide services to all students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I urge Congress to fully fund the federal share of the national investment in special education this year or at least provide a minimum of $13 billion immediately through the next supplemental appropriation.

• The federal funding provided through regular appropriations is inadequate (and currently averages less than $1,800 per child). The number of children with disabilities has increased from an estimated 6.9 million in Fiscal Year 2020 to an estimated 7.4 million for Fiscal Year 2021, causing a greater demand for resources.
• The complications school districts are facing, including inadequate home student internet access because of the coronavirus pandemic, have compounded the problem of inadequate federal funding for IDEA.
• I applaud Congress’ bipartisan leadership to provide preliminary resources to states and school districts for IDEA and other education services through the Education Stabilization Fund in the recent CARES Act. However, this funding is not sufficient and is far below what is needed to address the longer-term challenges districts and families are facing in order to provide a level of continuity in services to children with disabilities.

Furthermore, it is critical for Congress to provide narrowly tailored and temporary flexibility to school districts as they continue to act in good faith to provide appropriate special education and related services to the extent feasible to students with disabilities during this catastrophe that has interrupted normal school operations.

• The significant hardship affecting school districts’ efforts to continue to provide special education and related services in the amount and/or type required by a student’s Individualized Education Plan is raising a number of legal concerns that have not been addressed by the U.S. Department of Education’s guidance for schools during this pandemic.
• Temporary, targeted, and tailored flexibility to school districts is needed as they encounter challenges that are interrupting the delivery of certain special education services (such as HIPAA protections for students regarding services delivered online; public health directives preventing certain physical therapies; shortages of qualified staff caused by health and safety concerns; school building closures due to health and safety concerns where certain equipment and technology is housed and cannot be relocated; and, lack of Internet access and/or necessary hardware to connect service providers and instructional staff to students). These and other circumstances cannot be addressed effectively unless Congress intervenes.
Upon the resumption of normal school operations, school districts look forward to uninterrupted delivery of special education and related services in the amount and type required by a student’s Individualized Education Plan. Therefore, targeted and narrowly tailored flexibility to districts would be discontinued pursuant to any federal, state, and local clearances needed for a district to resume its normal schedule and delivery of education services.

Thank you for your service during these difficult times. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Name
School district
Contact information