

July 14, 2025

Dear Chair Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Capito, and Ranking Member Baldwin:

The undersigned former officials responsible for the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) under Republican and Democratic administrations are writing regarding the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 appropriations for IDEA that support infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities, their families, and the educators and other service providers who serve them. It has been our honor to serve a total of over 50 years overseeing the special education law implementation.

We are writing to urge you to reject recommendations made by the Administration to block grant IDEA Part B preschool (ages 3-5) and IDEA Part D National Activities funds and to uphold the existing statutory requirements in the special education law.

IDEA has had strong bipartisan support since the first version was passed in 1975. Implementation of this law, with support from Congress, has made significant progress in our shared goal for students to make meaningful gains and achieve important academic, postsecondary and employment outcomes. IDEA is essential to protecting the rights of and improving opportunities for the 9.5 million students with disabilities served under the law.

Important features of the law include specific funding for preschool children under Part B Section 619, and the Part D National activities that include personnel preparation, technical assistance, model demonstration, parent training and outreach, and the dissemination, evaluation and implementation of scientifically-based research. It is critically important that Congress fund all parts of the IDEA and ensure the FY 2026 bill includes details for each Part (e.g., Part B 619 preschool, Part B 611 grants to states, Part C early intervention, Part D National Activities *by program*.)

The proposal to consolidate and block grant preschool funding and Part D and send those funds to the states would have an immediate detrimental impact on special education, students with disabilities, schools and states.

- The Administration proposal dismantles the federal infrastructure that supports innovation, capacity building, and full access across states.
- States have not asked for this flexibility—and many have expressed concern about absorbing responsibilities without the resources, expertise, or infrastructure to maintain national quality.
- Merging preschool grants into Part B undercuts IDEA’s commitment to early childhood education—especially troubling as states face staffing shortages and service delays for young children with disabilities. A continued investment in early childhood education is critically important to effectively educate young children with disabilities.
- A recent Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) [report](#) finds that 37 states “need assistance” in meeting IDEA requirements. The technical assistance centers that provide

assistance to states in meeting requirements would likely be eliminated under this proposal.

- Federal oversight and national consistency matter—especially for children with disabilities whose needs aren't state-specific and whose rights should not depend on geography.

Finally, we respectfully request that you maintain the existing statutory authority for ED to oversee all education programs and not eliminate the department or move offices within ED to other departments. Proposals have been made to transfer functions authorized by IDEA to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations. As explained in this [brief](#), maintaining the department, as required by current law, is essential to students with disabilities and all students.

Thank you for considering our recommendations as you begin work on the FY2026 appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies. For additional information, please contact Stephanie Smith Lee, Policy & Advocacy Co-Director, National Down Syndrome Congress, at Stephanie@ndscenter.org.

Sincerely,

First Administration of President Donald Trump

Laurie VanderPloeg, Director, Office of Special Education Programs

Administration of President Joe Biden

Glenna Wright-Gallo, Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Katy Neas, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and Acting Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Valerie C. Williams, Director, Office of Special Education Programs

Administration of President Barack Obama

Alexa Posny, Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Michael Yudin, Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Sue Swenson, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and Acting Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Administration of President George W. Bush

Robert Pasternack, Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Stephanie Smith Lee, Director, Office of Special Education Programs

Alexa Posny, Director, Office of Special Education Programs

Administration of President Ronald Reagan

Madeleine C. Will, Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Administration of President Jimmy Carter

Edwin W. Martin, Jr., Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)

Administrations of Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter

Edwin W. Martin, Jr., Director, Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (precursor to Office of Special Education Programs)

Cc: House and Senate Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee members