July 22, 2020

The Honorable Maggie Hassan

324 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Murphy

136 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen

110 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Hassan, Murphy, and Van Hollen,

The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) writes to thank you for introducing the Supporting Children with Disabilities during COVID-19 Act. This legislation will provide critical funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as approximately 124,000 schools across the United States which serve the 7,000,000 students served under the IDEA begin to look towards and implement school reopening policies and activities while also implementing public health protocols and ensuring the safety of all children and students.

NDRN is a voluntary membership organization of Protection and Advocacy (P&A) agencies that are a nationwide network of congressionally mandated, cross disability rights organizations operating in every state in the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands). There is also a P&A affiliated with the Native American Consortium, which includes the Hopi, Navajo and San Juan Southern Paiute Nations in the Four Corners region of the Southwest. The P&A Network has the authority to provide legally based advocacy services and legal representation to all people with disabilities. P&As pursue legal, administrative, and other appropriate remedies under all applicable federal and state laws to protect and advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities. Collectively, these programs make the P&A Network the largest provider of legally based advocacy services to people with disabilities in the United States. Education cases comprise a significant percentage of the P&A caseload.

The need for dedicated IDEA funding related to COVID-10 is critical and **cannot** be overstated. The IDEA guarantees students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education and individualized education and services outlined in a child’s Individualized Family Support Plan or a student’s Individualized Education Program. During the unprecedented nationwide school closures due to COVID-19, students served under the IDEA have been disproportionally impacted as the delivery of education and related services moved to distance learning.

Schools across the country now face the herculean challenge of re-opening (whether in person or through distance learning), ensuring that students and staff are safe while at school and assuring that students with disabilities receive the education and services to which they are entitled. All of this will take place during massive state budget shortfalls which will impact state education budgets. The Supporting Children with Disabilities During COVID-19 Act appropriation of $11 billion for state grants under IDEA, $1.2 billion for early childhood education programs, and $55 million under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 **will be critical to help offset the enormous costs incurred by schools and districts as they make investments in technology products, services, and personnel training and move to re-open schools and educate all students, including students with disabilities***.*

Again, NDRN thanks you for your unwavering leadership and recognition of the critical importance of dedicated funding for the IDEA during this time as we work to ensure that schools have the necessary resources to serve every child with a disability and provide equitable educational opportunities to all. We look forward to working with you to help see this bill incorporated into the next stimulus bill. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Amanda Lowe at Amanda.lowe@ndrn.org.

Sincerely,



Curtis L. Decker

Executive Director