COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION FUNDING

April 9, 2010

Dear Budget Committee Member,

On behalf of the Committee for Education Funding (CEF), a coalition of 80 organizations and institutions representing early childhood through post-graduate education, we are writing to share our views on the education portions of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 Congressional Budget Resolution.

President Obama's budget represents a solid step forward for education at all levels by proposing a $3.5 billion (7.5 percent) increase in discretionary spending for programs in the Department of Education. It also proposes to submit a request for an additional $1 billion for elementary/secondary education programs after Congress reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). We also greatly appreciate the recent enactment of the Health Care and Education Reconciliation bill that provides $42 billion over ten years in mandatory funding for Pell Grants, community colleges, minority-serving institutions, and expanded income-based loan repayment options.

As you consider the FY 11 Budget Resolution, we urge you to build on these increases. While we recognize the overall fiscal constraints facing our country, we are disappointed that the President's budget freezes several key education programs, including Title I, Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, Impact Aid, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, campus-based student aid, GEAR-UP and TRIO and freezes the federal share of special education funding at only 17 percent.

At a time when schools, colleges, libraries and students face steep additional cuts due to continuing large state budget gaps and the looming funding cliff resulting from the termination of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds, it is critical that increases for these vital education programs be provided. It is important to understand that virtually all education funds provided in FY 11 will be spent in the 2011-12 school year when ARRA funds will no longer be available.

Even though the Department of Education has a proposed $3.5 billion, or 7.5 percent, discretionary increase, that figure is $76.8 billion below the FY 09 ARRA level, or minus 61 percent.

Under the Administration's budget all increased funding at the K-12 level would be through competitive grant programs, including the consolidation of 38 programs into nine new flexible funding streams. While such consolidations will be the subject of the ESEA reauthorization, from a budgetary perspective CEF has several concerns. Without increases in such programs as Title I and IDEA, states and schools will have difficulty developing their education budgets since under competitive grants no state or school district knows whether it will receive funds, how much it will receive, and when it will receive them. It is important to provide sustainable, predictable funding for our nation's schools.

CEF also believes that any program consolidations should not result in the elimination of essential education functions such as improving teacher preparation at institutions of higher education or providing K-12 students with sufficient specialized instructional support personnel nor be used as an excuse to reduce federal funding. In addition, we are opposed to the elimination of important programs including Enhancing Education Through Technology State Grants and LEAP.

At a minimum, we urge the Committee to include the $1 billion proposed by the President contingent on ESEA reauthorization as part of the overall FY 11 discretionary education budget, for a $4.5 billion increase.

CEF also recommends that the Committee support increases included in the President's budget for critical children's programs, including Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Child Nutrition.

We also urge you to provide funding in the Budget Resolution for early childhood education programs, such as the Early Learning Challenge Fund. The President's budget proposed $9 billion over ten years in mandatory funding to expand and improve early education programs. Unfortunately, funding for this program was dropped from the final reconciliation bill. We also urge your consideration for funding for school modernization. The House-passed SAFRA bill provided $4.5 billion for K12 and community college construction and modernization but such funding was dropped.

CEF further calls on Congress to provide immediate additional education fiscal relief to save jobs in the upcoming 2010-11 school year for teachers, faculty, other instructional personnel, administrators, and support staff at schools and colleges. Achieving needed reforms at the elementary and secondary level and increasing college access and completion will be very difficult if education institutions are forced to lay off tens of thousands of educators and reduce programs for students. A CEF compilation of state-by-state education cuts and layoffs is available on our website at: http://www.cef.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/education-layoffs1.pdf.

Investments in education are an essential element in improving our nation's economic growth and competitiveness. Individuals with less than a high school diploma have an unemployment rate more than five times that of those with a bachelor's or higher degree. Thus, investing in education now not only helps tens of millions of students become more productive citizens, but also helps our long-term fiscal situation.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Fansmith
President

Joel Packer
Executive Director