

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 4, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, and Education
Senate Appropriations Committee
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, and Education
Senate Appropriations Committee
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter:

We are writing to respectfully request that you provide the highest fiscally responsible increase in funding for the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP) in the fiscal year 2009 appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. ESSCP provides federal funding for critical school counseling programs and is authorized under Title V, Part D, Subpart 2 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. §7245.)

Since initial passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, the federal government has made a commitment to providing financial assistance to states, local school districts, and individual schools to help improve educational opportunities for low income and disadvantaged students. ESSCP is a valuable ESEA program that assists in this effort to improve education opportunities by providing funding for expanded counseling services for students. Pupil service professionals like school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists provide crucial daily academic and social services to elementary and high school students and increased ESSCP funding in fiscal year 2009 will help provide additional services to an even larger number of students.

As you know, the ESSCP's statutory language contains a funding trigger directing the Department of Education to award ESSCP grants only to elementary school programs unless the funding for ESSCP surpasses \$40 million. Under your leadership, Congress appropriated over \$48 million for ESSCP in fiscal year 2008, the first time that the statutory trigger was exceeded. The fiscal year 2008 appropriation ensured that secondary school programs were able to participate in the ESSCP program and helped to extend the benefits of ESSCP resources to our nation's middle and high school students. We urge you to provide increased appropriations to ESSCP to not only ensure the statutory trigger is met again, but to also ensure that we can provide as many ESSCP resources as possible to both our elementary and secondary schools.

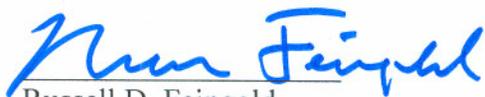
School counseling fulfills a vital role in American public education and supplements the important academic work that goes on in our nation's classrooms by providing valuable guidance and support to students and their families through academic and social

programming. School counselors and other pupil service professionals help to ensure that our schools meet the educational needs of the whole child, including students' social and health needs as well as academic needs. Unfortunately, this nation still has a long way to go in providing adequate pupil services to our nation's students. According to the American School Counselor Association, the recommended student-to-counselor ratio is 250 to 1, but in reality, the average student-to-counselor ratio now approaches 476 to 1. The recommended student-to-school social worker ratio is 400 to 1, but in many states, the number of students that social workers provide services to exceeds that ratio. The National Association of School Psychologists' Guidelines recommend a student-to-school psychology service staff ratio no higher than 1000 to 1, a ratio that is also exceeded in many states and school districts. Local, state, and federal resources will all be necessary to lower the student-to-pupil service provider ratios and ESSCP funds are critical to those ongoing efforts.

In order to close the pervasive achievement gap that exists in this nation and improve the quality of education for all of America's children, regardless of their background, much more needs to be done to improve our nation's schools. Providing increases in the ESSCP fiscal year 2009 funding is one way that we can continue efforts to improve the quality of educational services provided to all of America's children.

Thank you for your commitment to this program and your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



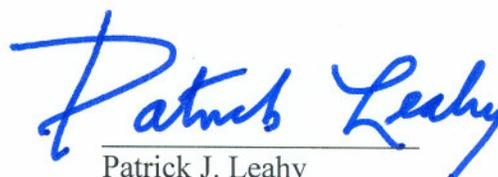
Russell D. Feingold
U.S. Senator



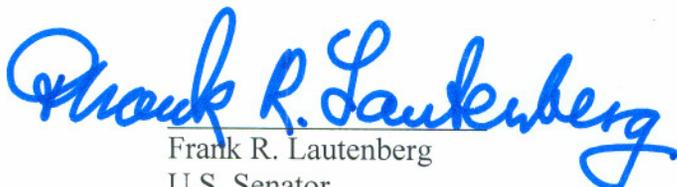
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U.S. Senator



Blanche L. Lincoln
U.S. Senator



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U.S. Senator



Frank R. Lautenberg
U.S. Senator



Barack Obama
U.S. Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
U.S. Senator



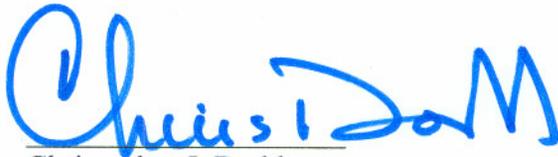
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U.S. Senator



Carl Levin
U.S. Senator



Christopher J. Dodd
U.S. Senator