

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 4, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,
Education, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,
Education, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
166 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Cochran:

We respectfully request that you include an appropriation of \$10 million for Reach Out and Read under the Fund for the Improvement of Education in the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill for FY 2010. Reach Out and Read is widely respected as a national program that promotes literacy and language development in infants and young children. An extensive body of research clearly demonstrates the importance of promoting early language and literacy skills in helping young children begin school ready to learn and succeed. Today, however, large numbers of children still lack the support and assistance needed to develop these essential skills before they begin kindergarten.

To meet this need, the federal government currently provides funding for a variety of early childhood education and literacy programs for children, parents, and the professionals who serve them. Reach Out and Read has become a powerful and effective program for promoting early language, literacy and school readiness, filling the crucial gap before children have access to traditional early childhood programs. It engages pediatricians and other health providers in guiding and encouraging parents to read aloud to their children from the earliest years of life, and send children home from each doctor visit with a prescription to read aloud together. It's an approach that's been proven effective by 15 years of published research.

Over the past nine years, Congress and the Administration have supported this effective approach to pediatric literacy. Since 2000, Congress has provided federal funding for Reach Out and Read through the Fund for the Improvement of Education at the Department of Education. These funds have been matched by tens of millions of dollars from the private sector and state governments, and this extraordinary public-private partnership has achieved remarkable results. Nearly 50,000 health providers in all 50 states have been trained in Reach Out and Read's strategies of early language and literacy promotion, and more than 4,100 clinics and hospitals nationwide have implemented the program, reaching more than 25 percent of at-risk children nationwide.

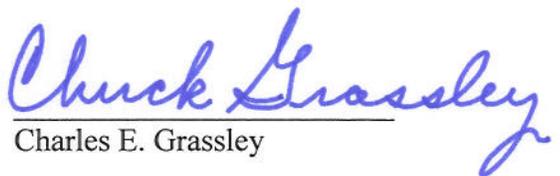
In recent years, however, federal funding for Reach Out and Read has been reduced significantly, from \$10 million in FY 2005 to \$4 million in FY 2008. Reach Out and Read now has more than 100,000 children on its waiting list for book distribution as a result of this reduction in funding. The shortfall has also shifted program costs to local safety net health providers, including community health centers and hospitals already struggling to maintain services for children. Restoring funding to this essential partnership is vital to maintaining the interest and participation of pediatricians nationwide in helping prepare children for school and life.

Reading at an early age provides a basic foundation for children as they enter school and move through the early grades. Reach Out and Read has been a lifeline for the nation's youngest children in developing their early language and literacy skills. We urge your Subcommittee to provide the requested funding for this important program in the FY2010 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill.

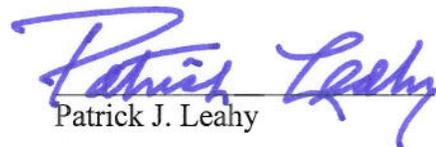
We certify that neither we nor our immediate family have a pecuniary interest in the congressionally directed spending item that we have requested, consistent with the requirements of paragraph 9 of Rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate. We further certify that we have posted a description of the items requested on our official website, along with the accompanying justification.

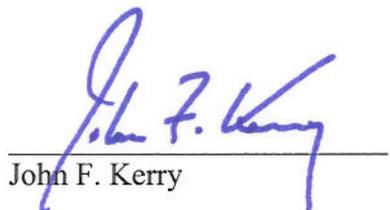
Sincerely,

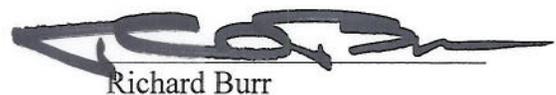

Edward M. Kennedy


Charles E. Grassley


Daniel K. Akaka

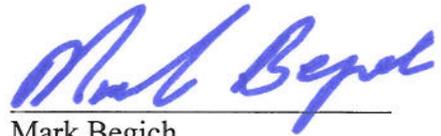

Patrick J. Leahy


John F. Kerry

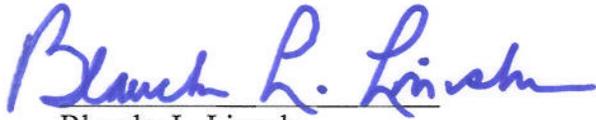

Richard Burr



Tom Udall



Mark Begich



Blanche L. Lincoln



Joseph I. Lieberman



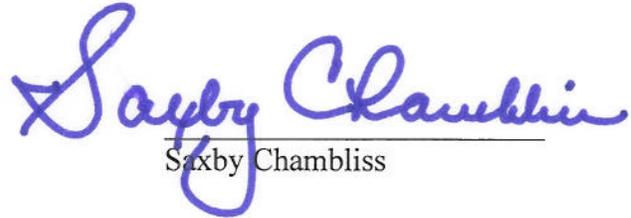
Richard G. Lugar



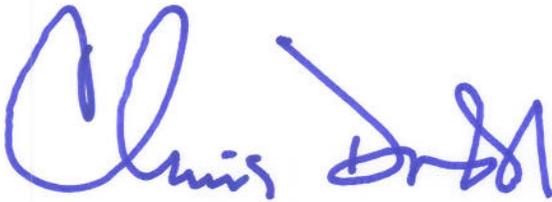
George V. Voinovich



Robert P. Casey, Jr.



Saxby Chambliss



Christopher J. Dodd



Bernard Sanders



Carl Levin



Debbie Stabenow

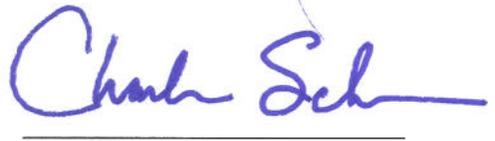


Kirsten E. Gillibrand



Ron Wyden


Sheldon Whitehouse

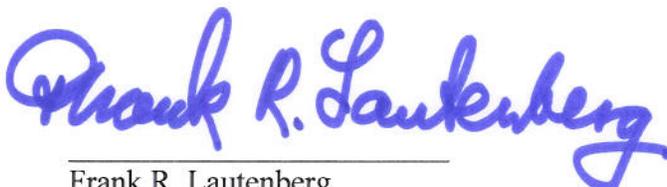

Charles E. Schumer

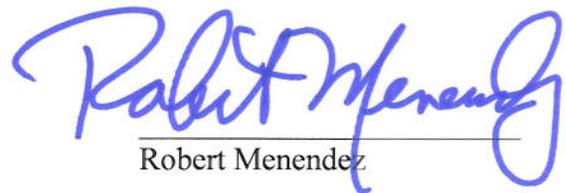

Amy Klobuchar

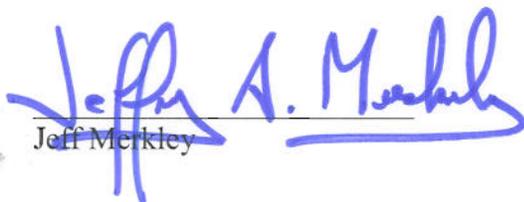

Mel Martinez


Jeanne Shaheen


Mark R. Warner

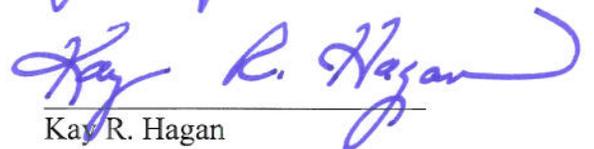

Frank R. Lautenberg


Robert Menendez


Jeff Merkley

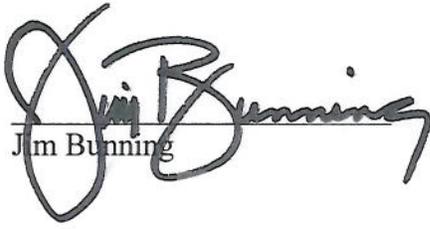

Jeff Bingaman


Sherrod Brown


Kay R. Hagan


John D. Rockefeller IV


Jack Reed


Jim Bunning


Jeff Sessions


John Cornyn


Maria Cantwell