

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 25, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

As the Subcommittee develops the Fiscal Year 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we respectfully request a total of \$50 million for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant program administered by the Department of Education and authorized in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). IAL provides competitive awards to school libraries as well as national not-for-profit organizations, including partnerships that reach families outside of local educational agencies (LEAs), to support children and families in high-need, underserved communities. By providing age appropriate books, supporting parental engagement programs, and reinforcing professional development, the IAL program helps to support literacy skills to ensure that children enter school ready to learn and best positioned for success.

Since its inception in Fiscal Year 2012, more than 200 IAL grants have been awarded to national non-profit organizations and school districts across every region of the U.S., delivering critical literacy resources in these communities. In light of interrupted learning this past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is even more urgent to support children's literacy at home and in school. While the challenges of the last year have negatively impacted the reading proficiency of many students, it is particularly acute for minority and low-income students. The IAL program is designed to provide the kind of support children and families need, through library programs that have been a digital literacy lifeline to community-based program and partnerships with primary health care providers to ensure that families can support literacy development at home. Some examples of IAL grant activities include:

Local Education Agencies and School Libraries –

- Tuscaloosa City Schools in Alabama, a midsize urban city school district serving 10,500 K-12 students in 20 locations, received an IAL collaborative grant to provide a learning environment that is racially, ethnically, culturally, disability status and linguistically responsive. The grant will allow the district and its school librarians to implement the Alabama Literacy Act to improve reading proficiency of public-school kindergarten through grade 3 students. The district will be able to provide early literacy services and distribute high-quality books on a regular basis to children from low-income communities.

National Non-Profit Organizations –

- Reading is Fundamental is a partner on an IAL five-year Grant with Dellingham City School District in Alaska. This grant will be used to fund a project that the district calls “LINKED,” or Literacy Innovation for Neighborhood Kids’ Education Development. The LINKED project will allow the district to expand upon its highest academic priority in education, by engaging with parents, guardians and the community, to dramatically increase district and

city library services for students. Some of those activities include a monthly book distribution service, family reading nights, an after school digital literacy program, and incentivized reading programs like the “Million Word Club” and the “Wolvereading Challenge.” Reading Is Fundamental is a key partner in the initiative providing professional development to educators to drive student impact.


- Reach Out and Read (ROR), a pediatric primary care model, endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, that embeds early literacy promotion in well-child check-ups, partnered with Save the Children, to engage schools and families of very young children in creating literacy-rich environments for more than 40,000 children in rural areas of Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky and South Carolina. Several school districts in Texas (Southwest, Charlotte, Cuero, Brownsville ISDs) and Oklahoma (Idabel) have incorporated the Reach Out and Read model in recent IAL projects. Pediatric primary care providers are able to reach children during the earliest years of life, ensuring that parents learn how sharing books together helps facilitate healthy brain development and language acquisition, starting at birth.

The National Center for Education Statistics 2019 reading assessment illustrates the urgent need for the early literacy skills development offered by school librarians. The Assessment showed that 35 percent of fourth grade students, 34 percent of eighth grade students, and 37 percent of 12th grade students performed at or above proficient for literacy.

Access to high-quality literacy programming and resources remains a critical component of childhood literacy. For American families living in poverty, the lack of access to quality reading materials and adequate learning facilities is prohibitive, fostering chronic disadvantages for already underserved youth. Without critical literacy support, students often fall behind in school and struggle to achieve their full potential.

Congress has taken an important step in supporting the needs of underserved students by providing IAL funding for book distribution, early literacy services, and effective school library programs. We ask you to provide \$50 million in funding for this important investment in the Fiscal Year 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

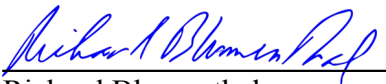
Sincerely,



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



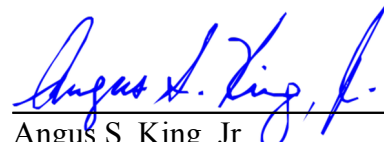
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



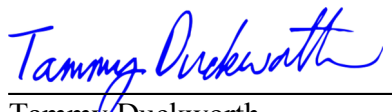
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



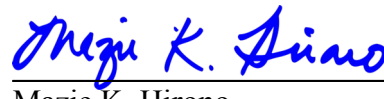
Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator




Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



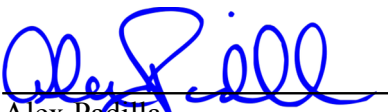
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



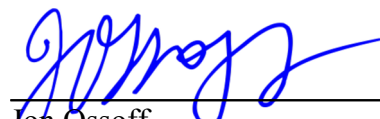
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



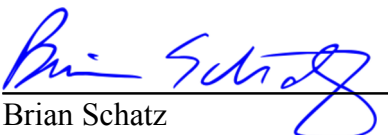
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



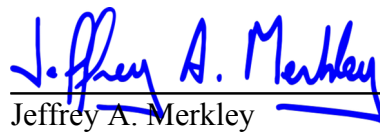
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



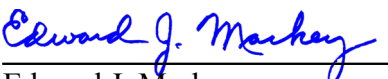
Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
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Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



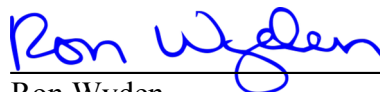
Edward J. Markey
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Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



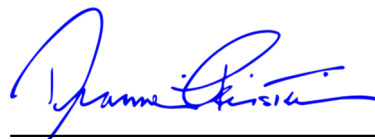
Jeanne Shaheen
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Amy Klobuchar
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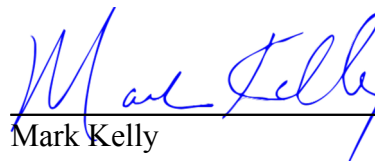
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