



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

May 10, 2011

The Honorable Buck McKeon
Chairman
Armed Services Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman McKeon:

On behalf of the members of Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Education Task Force thank you for your commitment to helping children from military families get the special education and other services they need to be independent and productive citizens. The purpose of this letter is to bring to your attention concerns we have about proposals to create a scholarship program for military dependent children with special education needs. During the debate of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2011, Congress explored the establishment of a pilot program on scholarships for military dependent children with special education needs. Through this pilot program, families could access \$7500 to offset the special education costs of their dependent child. We have been informed that a similar policy may be offered as an amendment during the upcoming mark up of the 2012 bill.

We believe that this provision will not address the real needs of these families for several reasons. First, when a family removes their child from the special education services of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the child loses his or her rights under the law to a free, appropriate, public education. Under IDEA, all of the costs associated with educating a child are provided at no cost to the family. Without these rights, parents have little leverage to utilize to get the services their child needs. Moreover, the annual current per-pupil expenditure for a child who receives special education is more than \$12,000. Thus, the size of the scholarship award is not sufficient to meet the needs of the average student who needs special education services.

Many of the organizations within the Education Task Force work with military families every day to help them navigate the education and health care systems that provide the services that are essential to the development of their child. We understand that these systems can be cumbersome, slow to act and frustrating. We also understand that children continue to grow while they wait for essential services.

We believe there are more effective long term and short term strategies to improve educational outcomes for military dependent children with special education needs. These strategies include:

1. Increasing the budget line for Impact Aid for Students with Disabilities by \$5 million
2. Increasing the budget line for Impact Aid for Children with Severe Disabilities by \$5 million
3. Establishing an advocate/liaison between military families and the state and local education agencies, as well as the school at which the eligible child will be educated; and
4. Staffing the Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs.

As you work to finalize congressional action on the National Defense Authorization Act, we request that you consider these strategies to address the very real needs of dependent military children with special education needs.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Katy Beh Neas
Easter Seals

Laura Kaloi
National Center
For Learning Disabilities

Cindy Smith
National Disability Rights
Network

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a coalition of nearly 100 national consumer, advocacy, provider and professional organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C. Since 1973, the CCD has advocated on behalf of people of all ages with physical and mental disabilities and their families. CCD has worked to achieve federal legislation and regulations that assure that the 54 million children and adults with disabilities are fully integrated into the mainstream of society. Approximately 50 national organizations participate in the CCD Education Task Force. For additional information, please contact:

Katy Beh Neas, Easter Seals

Laura Kaloi, National Center on Learning Disabilities

Cindy Smith, National Disability Rights Network

202.347.3066

703.922.5039

202.408.9514

kneas@easterseals.com

lkaloi@ncld.org

cindy.smith@ndrn.org