May 19, 2011

The Honorable Denny Rehberg
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education
House Appropriations Committee
2448 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education
House Appropriations Committee
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Rehberg and Ranking Member DeLauro,

We write in support of level funding for the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries Program at the last appropriated FY 2010 level of $19.1 million in the FY 2012 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill. For the second year in a row under President Obama’s FY 2012 budget request, this program has been consolidated with six other literacy programs under the Effective Teaching and Learning funding stream. The Improving Literacy Through School Libraries Program, the first program specifically aimed at upgrading school libraries, improves student literacy skills and academic achievement by providing schools with up-to-date library materials and ensuring that school libraries are staffed by state-certified school librarians.

The skills needed to function successfully in a 21st century global workforce go beyond reading. Business leaders are concerned that people are now entering the workforce without information literacy skills – those skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information – which equip people with the ability to think critically and work proficiently.

Education is not exclusive to the classroom; it extends into school libraries. Long regarded as the cornerstone of the school community, a good school library program is no longer just books. Instead, it is a sophisticated 21st century learning environment offering a full range of print and electronic resources that provide equal learning opportunities to all students, regardless of the socio-economic or education levels of the community.

Some of the major skills that school librarians teach are the techniques and methods for locating and answering curriculum needs through critical thinking. Using the library’s many and varied resources, school librarians also teach students how to work collaboratively, which, combined with the information literacy skills, is ideal for ensuring college readiness and success in the workplace. Even though school libraries are where students develop skills they will need for the 21st century, only 60 percent of public schools have a state-certified school librarian.
Since 1965, more than 60 education and library studies have produced clear evidence that school library programs staffed by qualified school librarians have a positive impact on student academic achievement. The Department of Education’s January 2009 evaluation of the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries Program found that it has been successful in improving the quality of those school libraries receiving the grants.

We agree that federal resources should be invested in programs that have demonstrated their success and this is what the Department of Education evaluation has shown in their evaluation of Improving Literacy Through School Libraries. However, we also understand the tough budget climate the federal government faces in FY 2012. Therefore, we urge you to level fund the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program at the $19.1 million level that it was appropriated for in FY 2010.

Thank you for your support of school libraries and the contribution they make to our children’s education.

Sincerely,

Raúl M. Grijalva
Rush Holt
Eddie Bernice Johnson
Mazie K. Hirono
Silvestre Reyes
Gregorio Sablan
David Loebsack
David Wu