November 10, 2011

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
119 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
115 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard C. Shelby
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

Thank you for including $30 million in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill to support disadvantaged children’s access to books, early literacy services, and effective school library programs through national competitive grants. We ask that you maintain this investment in your negotiations with the House on crafting a final appropriations bill for FY 2012.

Literacy remains at the core of academic achievement for all children, and is a strong indicator for long-term success and opportunity. Exposure to books is an essential part of early childhood literacy and preparation for school. Yet, two-thirds of America’s children living in poverty have no books at home, and the number of families living in poverty is on the rise. Additionally, we know that access to effective school library programs, staffed by trained school librarians, has a positive impact on student achievement, and offers students a way to develop and hone skills, including how to find and use information, that are critical for meeting college and career-ready standards.

By providing funding for book distribution, early literacy services, and effective school library programs, the Senate Appropriations Committee made an important statement about the importance of ensuring that disadvantaged students have access to these critical tools for success
in school and in life. We are grateful for your leadership in this area and urge you to ensure that this critical funding is included in the bill that is sent to the President.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed  
United States Senator

Chuck Grassley  
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

Roger F. Wicker  
United States Senator

Olympia J. Snowe  
United States Senator