

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 17, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable A. Mitchell McConnell, Jr.
Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Senate Majority Leader McConnell and Senate Minority Leader Schumer:

Schools across the country are gearing up to return for the fall, but so far, we lack a comprehensive, national strategy to ensure that children are safe in every classroom. As you continue to negotiate the next COVID-19-related stimulus package, we urge you to consider robust funding for K-12 education that will provide our public schools the resources they need to keep children, teachers, and families safe.

America's public schools are critical infrastructure that provide millions of students with an education as well as access to health services, food and nutrition services, and career planning programs. Under normal times, they have provided these services and a myriad of others without adequate funding. The pandemic has only exacerbated the situation. In re-opening, schools must factor in additional costs in sanitization and technology upgrades while operating with less funding due to the economic downturn. The average public school's tax base has shrunk in the wake of record unemployment and more than five months of lockdowns. Without federal assistance, our schools will hit their breaking point and America's children will be the ones who suffer.

The CARES Act provided over \$13 billion for states to distribute to schools in March. As teachers and staff worked to close out the academic year at the onset of the pandemic, public schools needed funding to accommodate a rapid shift to online education, restructure nutrition and health services, and provide support to students. Rather than distributing that assistance, the Department of Education and a number of states pursued policies that siphoned vital funding from public schools, sending it instead to private schools. In the CARES Act, Congress distributed education funding to states based on the presence of Title I schools to focus on helping low-income students with the greatest needs, yet Secretary DeVos allowed taxpayer dollars to go to private institutions with access to their own loan programs and funding sources. As Congress crafts the next stimulus package, we must ensure public schools receive the resources they need to serve our nation's students.

With the fall semester rapidly approaching, we must provide public schools with funding in four key areas. First, schools must have the resources to provide their teachers and other staff with PPE to protect those at high risk of contracting COVID-19. Second, we must make a long-overdue, one-time investment in the FCC's E-rate program to help public schools provide students remote access to their classrooms. Schools must have the readily available option to move to online instruction for the safety of their students and staff, if necessary. Third, we must invest in special education to guarantee that every child gets the help that they need to learn whether in the classroom or at home. Finally, fourth, we must make sure that Congress focuses aid on public schools instead of allowing the distribution of funds to programs that do not directly benefit public school children. It is our public schools that are in the greatest need of help. Simply put, public money should go to public schools.

The extraordinary passage of the CARES Act in March demonstrated a common will to provide for Americans in dire need of assistance during this unprecedented time. We believe that we can and must do more as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to ravage communities everywhere. We strongly encourage more funding for public K-12 education in the next stimulus package with safeguards to ensure that that money will go directly to public schools in a timely manner.

Sincerely,



Kendra S. Horn
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

/s/

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress



Jim Cooper
Member of Congress



Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress



Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



Xochitl Torres Small
Member of Congress



Conor Lamb
Member of Congress