July 31, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
Room S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
Room S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S-128, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S-128, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby, and Vice Chairman Leahy:

We write to oppose conditioning education funds in the next coronavirus relief package on the reopening of elementary and secondary schools for in-person instruction.

Over the course of the summer, a national debate has raged over the operating status of elementary and secondary schools this fall. During this time, state and local school leaders have been desperately seeking additional federal financial assistance and clear, scientifically-based federal guidance to support reopening schools safely in-person this fall.

Instead, the Republican-controlled Senate has failed to act on any major new coronavirus relief legislation since March. For his part, President Trump has threatened to withhold federal funds from schools that don’t reopen in person while trying to politically influence the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) school reopening guidance. Meanwhile, COVID-19 cases are surging throughout the country—with records for new infections being broken almost daily\(^1\), deaths rising\(^2\), and no end in sight.

With months wasted and without taking responsibility for his own failure of leadership that contributed to the recent surge in cases—President Trump continues to demand that schools reopen for in-person instruction at any cost in just a few short weeks. Congress should not be complicit in the President’s dangerous game that would risk the health and lives of students and school personnel for an empty talking point. America’s schoolchildren and educators are not the President’s sacrificial lambs—to be used to claim a false victory over the, still, out of control virus months before an election. Congress must reject any effort to condition federal assistance on schools reopening in person.


Instead, Congress should provide federal assistance to elementary and secondary schools that gives state and local officials the tools and resources they need to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for students, including students from low-income families and students of color, and a safe and effective working environment for educators and staff—whether it be in-person, remote, or a hybrid model. The Coronavirus Child Care and Education Relief Act (S. 4112) would do that by providing an additional $175 billion in assistance to elementary and secondary schools without regard to the operating status of schools and school districts. It also includes an additional $30 billion to help communities disproportionately impacted by this crisis, students with disabilities, and students struggling without access to internet and technology.

Every one of us wants schools to reopen when it is safe to do so. But, facts and science must drive those decisions, not Presidential pipedreams or impatience. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator
Tina Smith  
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies