



May 6, 2020

New York Congressional Delegation
United States Congress
Washington, D.C.

Dear Honorable Members of the New York Congressional Delegation:

As New York continues to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, providing adequate federal resources to ensure that the state can support vulnerable children and families is more important than ever. We are grateful for the federal leadership that you have already provided, and as an educational equity organization we are writing to request additional emergency aid that specifically addresses the needs of children and youth from low-income backgrounds, from communities of color, and from additional underrepresented and historically underserved groups.

We hope that you will move to quickly enact a new stimulus package that accomplishes the following three priorities:

1. Provide fiscal relief to states and additional support for education

State budget cuts represent a dire threat to educational equity – especially at a time when we need our education system to be doing even more for vulnerable children and youth.

We support the National Governors Association’s request for an additional \$500 billion in direct federal aid for states and territories that allows for replacement of lost revenue. In addition, we need a major infusion of targeted aid so that child care providers, K-12 public schools, and colleges and universities can meet the academic and other education-related needs of New Yorkers. Requests from national education and civil rights organizations for least \$50 billion in aid for access to high-quality child care, \$175 billion in aid to K-12 schools, \$50 billion in aid to colleges and universities, and \$50 billion in additional categorical aid for education are important steps in the right direction.

It is especially important that Congress also provide dedicated new flexible funding for extended learning time through summer programs, extending the school year, and/or extending or restructuring the school day in order to address learning loss – particularly for students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, and student experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or involved with the juvenile justice system.

These educational resources – coming alongside more federal aid to make up for lost state revenue – should include strong protections ensuring that new investment be used to supplement, and not supplant, existing revenue and services. In addition, all new aid should be distributed

through equity-driven formulas that recognize the intense needs of New York’s children and youth and the state’s unique place at the center of pandemic impact and response. Legislation should also require that states protect their highest-need schools and school districts from a disproportionate share of cuts, with specific metrics. Unfortunately, we know that the U.S. Department of Education will not on its own enact equity-driven fiscal accountability, reporting, and transparency requirements. We therefore ask that these be included as statutory requirements, as well.

Finally, the administration’s decision to prevent undocumented immigrants from participating in major educational and other provisions of the CARES Act represents a basic violation of New York’s values and our collective humanity. We urgently request that Congress reverse this cruel and racist decision and prohibit any such action in its next stimulus bill.

2. Address massive food insecurity among children and families

Our recent statewide poll of parents of infants and toddlers revealed that 1 in 3 parents are reducing or skipping meals for themselves as a result of the pandemic, and 1 in 10 are reducing or skipping meals for their children. Food insecurity for children and youth of all ages is intolerable – and it is avoidable.

We are grateful to Congress for enacting provisions designed to improve access to food programs, most notably the “Pandemic EBT” program in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. We hope that you will continue to prioritize food security in the next stimulus bill by:

- Creating a “Pandemic EBT” program for infants and toddlers and for college students from low-income backgrounds;
- Extending “Pandemic EBT” through the summer months (and longer based on need) for students at all age levels;
- Significantly expanding food aid by increasing SNAP benefits and eligibility, and relaxing work requirements;
- Providing increased funding dedicated to outreach so more eligible families can receive SNAP, WIC, and other food aid; and
- Enabling online applications for a wide variety of food and poverty program, as Senator Gillibrand and U.S. Rep. Morelle have proposed in the Health, Opportunity, and Personal Empowerment (HOPE) Act of 2020.

3. Invest in technology equity as a component of emergency preparedness

With significant uncertainty about how long the pandemic will last and whether additional school closures may be required in the fall or at some other point in the future, emergency preparedness in this new era must include ensuring equitable distance learning capacity.

When we polled parents of children in New York’s K-12 public schools, we found that parents from low-income backgrounds were more likely to be dissatisfied with their child’s experience with remote or distance learning than wealthier parents. Among parents who were not confident that their child would be able to participate in remote or distance learning, not having enough

devices in the home and the lack of reliable, high-speed internet access were top barriers. With school buildings closed statewide for the remainder of the school year and great uncertainty about the future, technological inequity is already widening gaping disparities in educational opportunity and outcomes.

U.S. Rep. Meng's Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020 would respond to these needs by establishing an Emergency Connectivity Fund at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to disburse funds to schools and libraries to purchase Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, and internet-connected devices for students and patrons. We urge Congress to support the Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020 and provide at least \$4 billion of funding for technology equity in the next stimulus bill, consistent with Senator Ed Markey's proposal.

Our polling also revealed that families' technology needs go beyond devices and internet access. Ninety-two percent of parents said it would be helpful to provide technical assistance to help families get set up for remote or distance learning, while only 33% of parents said their school currently provided this service. In addition, more than one-third of non-English home speakers said their child's school has not provided materials in other languages. Providing funding and requirements that create an expectation of outreach and support to all students and families is essential.

Thank you again for your work stabilizing our economy and protecting children and families during this difficult time. We would be happy to answer any questions about these priorities and to work with your staff on these important issues.

Sincerely,



Ian Rosenblum
Executive Director

CC: The Honorable Charles E. Schumer, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Kirsten E. Gillibrand, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Anthony Brindisi, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Yvette D. Clarke, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Antonio Delgado, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Eliot Engel, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Adriano Espaillat, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Brian D. Higgins, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries, U.S. Representative
The Honorable John M. Katko, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Pete King, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Nita Lowey, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Carolyn Maloney, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Sean Patrick Maloney, U.S. Representative

The Honorable Gregory Meeks, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Grace Meng, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Joseph Morelle, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Jerrold Nadler, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Tom Reed, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Kathleen M. Rice, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Max Rose, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Jose E. Serrano, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Elise M. Stefanik, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Thomas Suozzi, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Paul D. Tonko, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Nydia Velazquez, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Lee M. Zeldin, U.S. Representative