United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19th, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, HELP Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Enzi
Ranking Member, HELP Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi:

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions has recently begun to hold hearings on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The Senate Caucus on Foster Youth respectfully requests that the Committee invite youth in foster care to one of these hearings to testify about their experiences in the nation's educational system, and their suggestions for reform.

Youth in foster care report multiple school changes as they move from placement to placement. Because they change schools so frequently, youth in foster care are more likely than their peers to underachieve academically, repeat grades, and eventually drop out of school. Youth who do not graduate are more likely to be unemployed, have no health insurance, be single parents and rely on public assistance.

In addition, many youth in foster care present with greater mental health disorders such as depression, social phobias or panic syndrome than youth in the general population.

Yet despite the clear need for greater attention and support, these youth often fall through the cracks of the school system. They are often kept out of school because of lost or misplaced school records. This missing information increases the odds of enrollment delays, chronic absences and low levels of educational achievement.

We strongly believe that in preparing a reauthorization of the ESEA, Congress must take serious steps to improve the educational experience and outcomes of youth in foster care. A key first step is hearing from these youth directly during the Senate hearings on the ESEA.

We appreciate your attention to these concerns.

Sincerely,

Members of the Senate Caucus on Foster Youth

Charles E. Grassley
Co-Chair

Mary L. Landrieu
Co-Chair

Blanche L. Lincoln
United States Senator

Al Franken
United States Senator

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