

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 23, 2025

The Honorable Russell Vought
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St., NW
Washington, DC 20503

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon and Director Vought,

We write today with outrage at your reported decision to fire nearly everyone at the Department of Education (the Department) dedicated to delivering services and resources to infants, toddlers, children, youth, and adults with disabilities.¹ A federal judge has paused all of the illegal reductions-in-force issued during the government shutdown, noting that they appear to be “the epitome of hasty, arbitrary, and capricious decision-making.” We call on you to immediately end your illegal effort to fire these workers and ensure the offices are restored so that the staff can effectively implement statutorily required responsibilities assigned to the Secretary of Education.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), every student in America is legally entitled to a free, appropriate public education and yet you have decimated, without justification, the federal offices that help make that happen for children with disabilities and their families. By effectively closing these offices, you have sent a clear message: the Trump Administration does not believe that children with disabilities deserve an equal education.

Providing education and services for students with disabilities requires expertise, resources, time, and collaboration across the family, educator, service provider, school, district, state, and federal government. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) provides over \$15 billion in formula and discretionary grants to assist states and other eligible entities in meeting the costs of providing special education and related services for children with disabilities and to improve personnel preparation and professional development related to early intervention, educational, and transition services that improve outcomes for children with disabilities. Further, Congress has directed the Secretary to lead and direct activities to fund technical assistance, model demonstration, parent training and outreach, the dissemination of information to families and schools, and the evaluation and implementation of scientifically-based research activities designed to support children with disabilities, beginning and current special educators, general educators, specialized instructional support personnel and state and district leaders. OSEP also plays a critical role in ensuring states’ compliance with IDEA through conducting monitoring and oversight. This multi-faceted work is not just the right thing to do – it is required by law.

Firing the workers who are responsible for supporting children with disabilities and their families is just the latest action taken by an Administration that is bent not on returning such responsibilities to the states, where they already reside, but on taking it away from American

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2025/10/13/nx-s1-5572489/trump-special-education-department-funding-layoffs-disabilities>

families completely. Removing the expert staff responsible for implementation of IDEA's oversight follows the gutting of half of the Department's entire workforce that has taken place over the last six months. Despite IDEA requiring that the Secretary of Education provide certain monitoring, technical assistance, reporting and support, the Administration has pushed to illegally shift that responsibility to other federal agencies. Moreover, last month the Administration cancelled 34 grants administered by OSERS because supporting accessibility for students with disabilities purportedly conflicts with the Administration's priorities. These changes follow the Administration's budget proposal to roll up several IDEA funding programs set in law into one block grant and eliminate others, which would weaken accountability and effectively eliminate support for personnel preparation, parent information and training, and more. This proposal was rejected on a bipartisan basis by the Senate Committee on Appropriations and a partisan basis by the House Committee on Appropriations. Despite the damage that has already been done, there is still an opportunity to reverse course and prevent further harm.

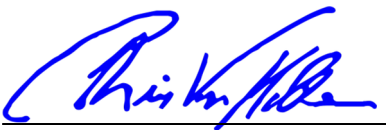
November 2025 marks the 50th anniversary of IDEA's predecessor law. It's a bittersweet milestone as IDEA requires that states protect students with disabilities from discrimination while also pledging that the federal government will support them by providing 40 percent of the cost of publicly educating students with disabilities. Although the essential protections of IDEA are in force, the federal government has never fulfilled its promise of providing 40 percent of the necessary funding. Your actions to undermine the rights and protections guaranteed by IDEA and the Department's ability to enforce them compounds that wrong. We must do more, not less, to support children with disabilities and their families.

We have already heard from families across the country who are fearful of losing services given the Department's actions. We demand you reverse the firing of the staff at these critical offices. To better understand the decision-making process and the Department's upcoming plans, we request answers to the following questions by October 30, 2025.

1. What was the total number of employees at the Department of Education charged with implementing IDEA on January 1, 2025?
 - a. How many employees at the Department of Education received RIF notices in October?
 - b. How many collective years of experience in supporting the education for children with disabilities would the Department lose if these RIFs proceed?
2. Explain the ongoing monitoring and enforcement responsibilities that have occurred in 2025, including the issuance of state determination letters in June 2025.
3. What communication have states received about the changes to expect as a result of these RIFs, including the states who received a determination of needs assistance, needs intervention, or needs substantial intervention in its determination this past summer?
4. What planning and analysis took place to ensure the Department of Education could comply with all statutory obligations under IDEA (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 701 et seq.), and any other applicable federal laws governing education for individuals with disabilities at the reduced staffing levels prior to October 10th, 2025?

- a. Please provide all documents related to this planning, including any assessments of the number of employees needed to fulfill statutory obligations and how this could be accomplished at the reduced staffing levels established by the October 10th RIF.
 - b. Please explain each change in staffing, policy, and procedure planned from those applicable during the carrying out of the statutory obligations during fiscal year 2025
 - c. Please explain what communication has been provided to states since the October 10th RIF.
5. Please detail any further plans under consideration to consolidate, close, or move any offices responsible for administering and enforcing programs under IDEA, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and any other applicable federal law administered by OSERS and the specific legal authority for doing so.
6. President Trump has indicated that the Administration will continue to cut “Democrat programs” until the current government shutdown ends.² What aspect of complying with the law and supporting students with disabilities is a partisan issue? What other educational programs are in consideration for being cut because the President considers them “Democrat programs”?

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

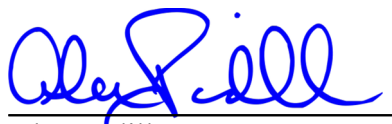
²<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/14/us/politics/trump-threats-democrats-shutdown.html>



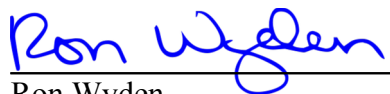
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



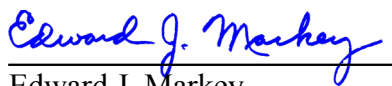
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



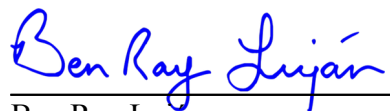
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



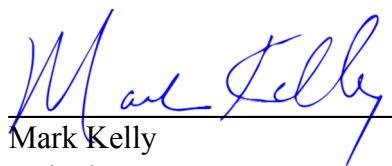
Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



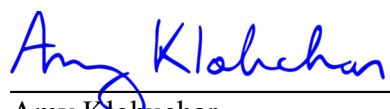
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator