

To: Members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly
From: [List Advocates]
Date: March 4, 2016
Re: **Funding for Special Education in FY 2015-2017 budgets**

We are writing to you on behalf of parents, students, and community members across Pennsylvania to ask for your support to address the critical educational needs of students with disabilities.

We strongly urge you to support at least \$100 million in additional special education funding over the course of fiscal years 2015 through 2017, to be distributed through the special education funding formula. School districts desperately need new special education dollars to ensure that children with disabilities receive the high quality inclusive education they need and to which they are legally entitled. A 2009 study showed that there was a \$380 million funding gap for special education. Since that time, state funding for special education has been virtually flat-lined, with only a modest increase for the 2014-2015 school year. The gap between adequate and actual special education funding continues to grow.

Students with disabilities are some of Pennsylvania's most educationally at-risk children, and they need your support now.

We are calling on you to support additional funding for special education for the nearly 270,000 students with disabilities across Pennsylvania. Insufficient funding has resulted in an insufficient number of staff to support our students as well as deep cuts to critical resources and services that these students need to make educational progress.

Relatedly, funding deficits in basic education also impact students with disabilities. **We urge you to increase the state's basic education funding for the current fiscal year by at least \$377 million and \$200 million for next year.** While this is only a down payment on the actual dollars needed to reach adequacy, this additional money will help schools recover from past funding cuts that have devastated our schools and harmed students, while also beginning to implement a new, bipartisan basic education formula that will distribute education dollars fairly. Pennsylvania has the widest funding disparity between wealthy and poor school districts of any state in the country. As a result of divestment and the unequal distribution of funding, students with disabilities are not receiving the education they deserve and to which they are legally entitled.

Finally, we hope the General Assembly will revisit the recommendations made by the 2014 bipartisan Special Education Funding Commission. All public schools serving children with disabilities, including charter schools, should receive tiered funding based on the needs of the students they serve.

Both additional resources and the equitable distribution of those resources are needed to ensure that students with disabilities in all public schools receive the appropriate supports and services they desperately need to be successful in school and beyond. We thank you

for your continued commitment to education and investing in the future of Pennsylvania's children. We hope this commitment will transcend the current political gridlock: the education of our most educationally at-risk students must be prioritized over politics.

Thank you for your consideration.