

For Immediate Release
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Van Hollen, Tester Introduce Legislation to Fully Fund Special Education

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) and Jon Tester (D-Mont.) introduced the IDEA Full Funding Act. This legislation would finally ensure Congress' commitment to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 1975, Congress passed IDEA to ensure that every child with a disability has access to educational opportunity. This legislation was a historic step forward, but since its passage Congress has failed to provide the funding promised under this bill.

“All schools should have the resources they need to provide a quality education to students with disabilities – it’s past time that Congress made good on its commitment to educators, students, and parents. That’s why I’m proud to introduce this legislation in the Senate to ensure a first-class education for every child. I urge my colleagues to pass this important legislation immediately,” **said Senator Van Hollen, who also championed this legislation in the House of Representatives.**

“Every student has a unique set of needs, experiences, and capabilities that should never prevent them from getting a quality public education,” **said Tester, a former public school teacher and school board member.** “Unfunded federal mandates handcuff our local school districts, draining their already meager resources and eroding local control. This bill will empower local educators and ensure every Montana student has access to a quality education.”

“Investment in education matters, and when it comes to federal government support for our nation’s public K-12 schools, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a cornerstone program that has proven critical to helping level the educational playing field for students with disabilities. When created in 1975, Congress committed to supporting 40 percent of the additional costs associated with educating students with disabilities, a commitment that has continually fallen far short. In fact, the federal share for both FY17 and FY18 is below 15 percent, less than half of the federal commitment. We are very appreciative for Senators Van Hollen and Tester and their tireless leadership on this issue, providing a legislative pathway forward for Congress to realize its commitment. We applaud their commitment to this issue and are very proud to strongly support the IDEA Full Funding Act,” **said Daniel A. Domenech, Executive Director, AASA, The School Superintendents Association.**

“We thank Senator Van Hollen for remaining a steadfast champion in urging Congress to finally live up to its decades-long promise to fully fund special education and help our students most in need. Congressional failure to do so hurts not only students with disabilities, but all students – as states and school districts face greater financial pressure to make up for the federal shortfall,” **said Marc Egan, Director of Government Relations, NEA.**

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“Full funding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a top legislative priority for the Association of Educational Service Agencies. Our students with disabilities are general education students first, and the lack of funding from the federal government for IDEA hurts state and local education budgets and our ability to support students with disabilities as well as the broader general education programming. We applaud Senators Van Hollen and Tester for their continued leadership on the issue of IDEA full funding. We are proud to strongly support the IDEA Full Funding Act and the pathway it provides towards realizing a past-due commitment to a historically disadvantaged population which include students with disabilities” **said Joan Wade, Executive Director, Association of Educational Service Agencies.**

Under the 1975 IDEA legislation, the federal government committed to pay 40 percent of the average per pupil expenditure for special education. However, that pledge has never been met, and current funding is at just 15.7 percent. The IDEA Full Funding Act would require regular increases in IDEA spending to finally meet our commitment to America’s children and schools. In addition to Senators Van Hollen and Tester, this legislation was cosponsored by Senators Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Bob Casey (D-Pa.), Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.), and Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.).

A letter of support from over 20 education groups can be found [here](#). The full text of the legislation can be found [here](#).