



National Coalition For Literacy

May 15, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20500

Dear Mr. President

I am writing to share with you the views of the National Coalition for Literacy on the 2010 Budget for the Department of Education and its treatment of adult education and family literacy programs.

Let me begin by thanking you for proposing an increase in funds for the adult education basic grant program. We appreciate the increase, but would point out that it falls far short of the resources that we need to meet the current demand for adult education services.

The Coalition also realizes the budget is tight and there are many programs competing for funds. However, at a time in our nation's history when we are trying to put our citizens back to work, to encourage our parents to become involved in their children's education, an increase to a funding level of \$750 million is needed to eliminate waiting lists and provide high quality services to our nation's adult education students.

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy estimated that 93 million individuals lack the literacy skills needed to reach their full potential. Many of these individuals are parents who cannot read to their children or fully participate in their education. Others are the unemployed and underemployed looking for the skills required to participate in training programs or merely upgrade their skills to compete in today's highly technological society. Others are new immigrants striving to learn the English language.

And yet, there appears to be a lack of concern about providing these individuals with the skills to overcome the obstacles placed before them. Several years ago combining federal, state and local funds, the adult education system was able to serve close to 3 million individuals (out of more than 90 million in need of assistance). Today, with higher demands for assistance, we can reach only 2.3 million.

What does this say to the unemployed worker, the new citizens striving to learn English, the parents anxious to learn to read to their children and become involved in their education? It says it is ok to leave them behind. But, Mr. President, we cannot afford to leave any citizen behind if we want to keep our nation strong.

Another concern is the proposed elimination of funding for the Even Start family literacy program, which combines adult education and early childhood education to break the cycle of illiteracy. There is not another federal education program that can help families in this manner.

It is our understanding that the Administration's decision to eliminate funding for the Even Start Family Literacy Program is based, at least in part, on the 2003 Third National Even Start Evaluation findings. It is generally acknowledged that those results were supported by an inadequate sample size that was flawed in its representation of the Even Start population. By the designers' own admission, the study implementation was not random. The evaluation was conducted prior to the enactment and implementation of the LIFT Act and its tougher standards that held Even Start to higher accountability. Assessments of the over-represented Hispanic/Latino population were inadequate and did not capture the linguistic ability and literacy outcomes of these adults and children. In fact, the evaluators admitted that the evaluation had questionable generalization to the point of acknowledging that: "Care should be given in applying the findings to Even Start as a whole." In addition, states across our great nation have evidence that Even Start children are thriving and performing well in school, and that their parents are getting off welfare, continuing their education, finding employment, etc.

Mr. President, the Coalition commends the Administration for its focus on early childhood education and strongly agrees we must invest in our nation's youngest citizens. However, many of our most at-risk children reside in homes where one or both of their parents have educational deficits. Early childhood education alone will not guarantee that these children will succeed. By working with parents and children together, family literacy provides a better avenue of success for these children and their families. We need family literacy programs such as Even Start.

You also proposed eliminating the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). After the first assessment of adult literacy in our nation (the National Adult Literacy Survey), Congress created NIFL to fill a need for resources that was not being met through other government entities. In recent years, the past Administration attempted to focus the work of NIFL on literacy across the lifespan. The adult education community opposed this move, citing adequate resources throughout the government already focused on K-12 education. At the same time, adult education still does not have the resources necessary to continue to improve practice and provide the best possible education to adults over the age of 16 who lack a high school diploma or GED or do not have adequate literacy skills. While we agree there are aspects of NIFL that can be improved, we strongly support the continuing of funding for NIFL with a renewed focus on adult education.

Mr. President, we have already lost the only federal research center focused on adult education and to compound this with the elimination of NIFL sends a message to our field that adult education is not valued. It tells those seeking assistance they are not important. We need a

sound research base to inform practice and improve instruction. We cannot meet the demands set forth by Congress for research-based curriculum, instructional practice, and program improvement without this support or without the resources we have received from NIFL over the years.

When you consider all of these things, the lack of adequate funding, the lack of the resources currently provided by NIFL, and the lack of a federal research center, you are essentially putting approximately 93 million adults at risk, as well as their children who will never have the benefit of full parental participation in their education.

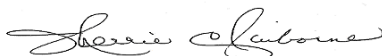
Adult education has helped millions of our nation's most at risk adults to leave welfare rolls, obtain jobs, get promotions, earn high school diplomas or GEDs, enter job training, transition to postsecondary education or just read to their children, to name just a few of their accomplishments. Educating adults helps them achieve lifelong dreams and earn family sustaining wages.

Our programs are staffed with highly dedicated professionals and volunteers who earn low wages or generously donate their time, but still strive to give 110 percent to help fellow Americans. And yet, our government is telling them their work does not count.

Please Mr. President, you overlooked our contributions during the stimulus, please do not do so again with a budget that appears to consider adult education and Even Start as unnecessary or unimportant programs. They make a life-changing difference in the lives of so many individuals. Just ask them.

Please contact me at sherrienevilsclaiborne@hotmail.com should you have any questions regarding the views of the National Coalition for Literacy on the proposed 2010 Budget.

Sincerely,



Sherrie Claiborne
President

CC: Arne Duncan, Secretary,
Department of Education
Mr. Glenn Cummings, Deputy Assistant Secretary, OVAE
Ms. Cheryl Keenan, Director, DAEL
Mr. Dan Miller, Acting Director, NIFL

Members:

House and Senate Appropriations Committees
House Committee on Education and Labor
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions