



October 19, 2011

Via email eseacomment@help.senate.gov

Chairman Tom Harkin
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions
615 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Michael Enzi
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi,

On behalf of the National Women's Law Center, an organization that for 38 years has worked to expand the possibilities for women and girls in the areas of education and employment, family economic security, and health, we write regarding the Senate HELP Committee's consideration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2011 ("ESEA").

The ESEA bill that the Committee plans to mark up today falls seriously short of ensuring that all children have access to a quality education that will prepare them for college and careers, despite the fact that it contains some positive elements.

The bill sets no goals or targets for states to improve student achievement or graduation rates, and leaves it up to each state to determine which achievement gaps merit attention. The bill also does not go far enough to effectively address bullying, harassment, and excessive disciplinary practices, among other things.

The Center applauds the bill's requirement that funds granted for science and math improvements increase access to high-quality courses for girls and other students who are underrepresented in STEM fields, the bill's inclusion of dropout factories in its proposed accountability framework, and the inclusion in Title IV of important provisions aimed at improving conditions for learning. The Center is glad that the bill at least retains the authorization of funds to promote gender equity in education and assist institutions with Title IX compliance. Moreover, if the Murray-Blumenthal amendment passes, it will improve data reporting to ensure that the needs of subgroups of boys and girls are not masked, so that interventions can be better targeted.

The fact remains, however, that the Center has major concerns about the bill as a whole. In light of the barriers that girls of color face in school, their alarming low graduation rates, and the resulting impact on them, their families, our communities, and our national economy, today's debate in Committee should be just the beginning. Congress must address the fundamental flaws in this bill as the process moves forward.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Fatima Goss Graves or Lara S. Kaufmann at 202-588-5180.

Sincerely,



Marcia D. Greenberger
Co-President



Fatima Goss Graves
Vice President for Education & Employment