March 21, 2025

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Chairman, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tim Walberg
Chairman, Committee on Education and Workforce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Ranking Member, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member, Committee on Education and Workforce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Cassidy, Chair Walberg, Ranking Member Sanders, and Ranking Member Scott:

The undersigned members of the National English Learner Roundtable (NELR) write to express our deep concern over how the recent reduction in force (RIF) at the U.S. Department of Education ("the Department"), as well as the Department's stated intention to reorganize certain offices and functions, will negatively impact the education of the nation's 5.3 million English learners (ELs) and request your prompt oversight and intervention to reverse the Department's actions.

Specifically, we draw your attention to the Department's decision on March 11th to terminate all or nearly all staff within the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) and its letter to State Education Chiefs on March 14th that indicated its intent to move OELA into the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). We strongly object to both of these actions.

As you know, OELA has been charged with managing the $890 million English Language Acquisition (ELA) program, upon which every state depends to help ELs attain English language proficiency and meet the same challenging academic standards as their non-EL peers. It also operates a number of other programs authorized within Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), including:

- Native American and Alaska Native Children in Schools (NAM) grants, which provide funding to schools primarily attended by Native American and Alaska Native children to help them reach proficiency in English and Native American languages, as well as in other academic content areas.
- National Professional Development (NPD) grants, which are awarded to Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) or other eligible entities to provide professional development activities to help educators improve instruction for ELs. Just last year, OELA awarded more than $40 million in grants to 13 IHEs and school districts, aiming to address the critical, national shortage of bilingual teachers.
- The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA), which serves as a repository of best practice information for EL instruction and OELA resources and leads activities for educators, states, and other stakeholders to support their work with ELs.

The actions taken by the Department in the past few weeks imperil its ability to legally and efficiently operate these critical programs.

First, we are deeply concerned that the Administration has removed virtually all Department staff with extensive expertise and institutional knowledge in ELs and the Congressionally authorized programs that serve them. These now-terminated staff have placed ELs front and center no matter the Administration in which they served. They knew which efforts yielded positive outcomes for ELs and which didn't. They provided critical technical assistance to states and monitored state plans to make sure states were held accountable for providing adequate services to ELs. They also ensured that states met ESEA's requirements, including ensuring that ELs were properly identified in a timely manner and able to access the services to which they are entitled. Simply put, their knowledge and skill sets are not easily replaceable or interchangeable—and it is not clear that the Department has plans to even try to replace them.

Second, we do not believe that moving OELA to OESE is a solution to the staffing issue that the RIF has created. Reports indicate that when the ELA grant program was managed previously by OESE, states received less technical assistance and support in meeting the requirements for this program. Additionally, ELs will receive far less attention in OESE as that office has innumerable focuses and manages other, even larger programs, including Title I. Finally, OESE very likely now contains few staff with a high level of knowledge of or experience with ELs and EL programs, thus providing us with little assurance that the Title III programs will be managed efficiently and effectively.

Third, we assert that the Department illegally usurped Legislative Branch authority by eliminating OELA as a stand-alone office within the Department of Education. Congress formally established OELA as a separate entity and the position of OELA Director under the Department of Education Organization Act. Since that time, OELA has reported directly to the Secretary. Under the planned reorganization, OELA would be dissolved into OESE and would now report to the Assistant Secretary of OESE. We do not accept this diminution in OELA's legal status.

It is our position that this Department has acted haphazardly in removing nearly all experienced EL staff and shifting a much-reduced OELA under OESE, without notifying Congress or providing a plan to ensure that these changes do not negatively impact the students and families that depend on these programs. We fear that our nation's 5.3 million ELs, who make up one in ten of all K-12 public school students and are primarily U.S. citizens, will be most adversely impacted by the Department's actions. Our nation cannot afford to test what would happen if this significant share of the student population did not efficiently receive all of the benefits and protections to which they are legally entitled under Title III of the ESEA—including evidence-based language instruction and more highly trained teachers who are informed of the best practices and resources required for ELs to thrive.

Therefore, as the leaders of the education authorizing committees, we urge you to conduct immediate oversight and ensure that OELA's staff is rehired and its position as a standalone

office is quickly restored, thereby allowing the continued faithful execution of the Department of Education Organization Act.

To that end, we urge you to pose the following questions to the Secretary:

- Who will be the Director of OELA?
- Who will be in charge of the ELA grant program, who will be providing technical support and monitoring of these grants to all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and D.C.?
- Who will be in charge of the 107 NPD grants and 15 NAM grants?
- Who will be in charge of managing the NCELA website?
- What is the Department's plan to faithfully meet all of its statutory obligations to English language education and ELs under Title III of the ESEA?

We must also note that the entirety of cuts through the March 11 RIFs at the Department include other offices and their attendant personnel that are important to supporting ELs, including the Office for Civil Rights, Federal Student Aid, and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Furthermore, we understand that the Department's actions will have profound consequences beyond EL education and we stand in solidarity with the entire community of students, families, and teachers who will be impacted by these changes. Therefore, we also request oversight and intervention to address the broader impact of the March 11th RIF on the education ecosystem as a whole.

In conclusion, we call your attention to how the March 11th RIF and the Department's plan to reorganize offices and functions will negatively disrupt the education of our nation's 5.3 million ELs. We urge you, as leaders of the education authorizing committees, to conduct prompt oversight and restore OELA, including by ensuring that it continues to manage all Title III programs as it is best suited to do for the benefit of our ELs.

Should you have any questions, please contact NELR co-chairs Amalia Chamorro (achamorro@unidosus.org) and Bill Rivers (william.p.rivers@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

ACTFL
American Association of Interpreters and Translators in Education
American Federation of Teachers
Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents
CABE (California Association for Bilingual Education)
Californians Together
Center for Applied Linguistics
ImmSchools
Joint National Committee for Languages
NAELPA
National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)

National Council for Languages and International Studies
National Education Association
New America's PreK-12 Team
Seal of Biliteracy.org
TESOL International Association
UnidosUS