Statement of Chairman Castle
Committee Mark-up of H.R. 4055
April 12, 2000

I am pleased to join with Chairman Goodling and the other co-sponsors to support this bill that would put Congress on track to reach full funding of IDEA by FY2010.

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), a law which established the federal commitment to provide up to 40 percent of the average per pupil expenditure to assist with the excess costs of educating students with disabilities. Historically, however, the appropriations for IDEA have not come close to reaching the 40 percent level. In fact, just this year funding reached 12.6 percent of the national average -- the highest funding level in the history of the program -- but still 27.4 percent short of the full federal commitment.

As a former Governor, I have a unique understanding of special education funding and the burden that it places on states and localities who must assume these costs. On average, local school districts spend on average 20 percent of their budgets on special education.

In Delaware, for instance, our largest school district, the Christina School District, currently receives $1.6 million per year in special education funding. The federal commitment is to pay Christina School District $5.2 million. This means that if we fulfilled our commitment, Christina School District would have an additional $3.3 million to focus on the needs of their students and teachers. The entire State of Delaware, if special education were fully funded, would receive an additional $25.9 million.

This is a tremendous amount of money that is needed by local schools in order to reduce class size, build and modernize schools, and implement technology into education. If the federal government fulfills its commitment to fund 40 percent of special education costs, States and schools across the nation would have the opportunity to focus their funds on the unique and individualized needs of their schools.

While I believe that we should exercise caution when we significantly increase funding for any program, I also believe the federal government needs to do a

better job of helping our local schools provide a free, appropriate education for our children with special needs. And, as we increase funds, we must continue to hold states and school districts accountable for the responsible use of these funds.

The Republican Congress has worked to increase special education funding. This bill, which authorizes a deliberate schedule for reaching the 40 percent commitment and is consistent with the House Budget Resolution, is the appropriate next step in fully funding IDEA.