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December 1, 2015

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on
Education & the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on
Education & the Workforce
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman, Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
835 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott, Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, I am writing in support of the *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015* which makes important, bipartisan updates to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). I am pleased that Congress is approaching final action on reauthorization of ESEA because the public charter school movement has undergone tremendous change and seen significant growth since Congress passed the *No Child Left Behind Act*, and the provisions of ESEA affecting charter schools were overdue for an update.

The updates made to the Charter Schools Program (CSP) will strengthen public education by supporting the growth of high-quality public charter schools and increasing educational opportunities for all students. Charter schools are the fastest-growing choice option in U.S. public education. Over the past five years, student enrollment in charter public schools has grown by 62 percent. In 43 states and the District of Columbia, nearly three million students now attend charter schools — which is more than six percent of the total number of students enrolled in all public schools. In 14 districts, 30 percent or more of students are enrolled in charter schools, and in more than 160 districts, at least 10 percent of students attend charter public schools. We believe the CSP in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* better reflects the needs of the current public charter school landscape.

From the perspective of the charter school community, the conference report includes notable improvements over current law, including: the authorization of dedicated funding for grants for the replication and expansion of high-performing charter schools, language permitting charter support organizations to participate in the state grants program, more flexible uses of funds, provisions that strengthen charter school authorizer quality, and prioritizing states that provide equitable funding to charter schools and that assist them in accessing facilities. These improvements reflected a welcome

willingness of members and staff to work with our community, understand our concerns, and take serious actions to improve the CSP and other ESEA provisions, and for that we are extremely grateful.

Similarly, we appreciate clarifying and codifying current guidance that permits the use of weighted lotteries for student enrollment, as well as permitting schools receiving CSP funds to prioritize students that attended earlier grades in the same network of charter schools. These provisions will support the opening of new high-quality public charter schools to serve the growing number of students on charter school wait lists. Similarly, given the significant expansion of charter schools nationwide, we thank you for including representatives of charter schools in consultation requirements throughout the Act, including in negotiated rulemaking.

In addition, we strongly support the provisions under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* that preserve the annual assessment requirements in reading and math under current law, ensuring continued access to disaggregated data and helping parents make more informed decisions about their children's education. We also support the requirement that 95 percent of all students participate in statewide assessments for accountability purposes, to ensure that assessments provide meaningful information about how well schools are serving their students.

Lastly, we support the accountability provisions in the bill that require states to set goals for all groups of students, which will help ensure that all students graduate prepared for postsecondary education or the workforce. Similarly, we support requiring states to intervene in their lowest-performing schools, and to set aside federal funds to intervene in those schools. We believe that charter schools have an important role to play in turning around low-performing schools and providing students in failing schools with access to seats in high performing schools.

Thank you again for your leadership and bipartisan efforts to bring about important modernizations to ESEA. We look forward to working to achieve the successful implementation of this law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nina G. Rees". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nina" being the most prominent.

Nina Rees
President and CEO