April 27, 2016

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), I write to urge you to oppose the SOAR Reauthorization Act. This bill would eliminate important rights for students with disabilities.

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) represents 67 University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) and 43 Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) programs. We work with thousands of schools, tens of thousands of teachers, and hundreds of thousands of students each year.

Despite receiving public funds, the private schools participating in the D.C. voucher program are not subject to all federal civil rights laws and do not adhere to religious freedom protections provided to public school students under the First Amendment. Additionally, these schools do not face the same public accountability standards that all public schools must meet, including those in Title VI, Title IX, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Our specific concerns start with the fact that States cannot, by delegating the education function to private voucher schools, place students beyond the reach of the federal laws in its administration of publicly funded programs. Also, parents would be required to give up rights under the IDEA. Families must not be required to give up substantive requirements under IDEA, nor their procedural right to an impartial due process hearing when the schools fail to comply. Schools that accept federal funds under voucher programs must comply with all applicable federal laws, and the Individualized Education Program (IEP) must remain the cornerstone of providing individualized special education and related services designed to meet each eligible student’s unique needs. The law, in its current form, remains silent on this issue and should contain language that upholds all IDEA rights to fully protect children.

We are committed to ensuring that all students with disabilities are fully and equitably included in the law; therefore, we oppose the bill in its current form. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Andy Imparato
Executive Director
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