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September 21, 2015

Superintendent Glenda Ritz
Indiana Department of Education
115 W. Washington St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Superintendent Ritz:

We are writing to share our concerns about the approach used by the Indiana Department of Education to distribute federal Title I dollars to public schools (both traditional and charter) for fiscal year 2016. It has been brought to our attention that public charter schools may have been treated unfairly during funding disbursement and we want to know why.

According to reports, charter schools in our state saw a \$2.3 million dollar decline in Title I funds in FY2016. At the same time, some traditional public school systems, like Indianapolis Public Schools, for example, received an additional \$1.5 million in Title I funds despite a decline in enrollment. Not only do these disbursements appear to be unfair to charter school students and teachers, they could also be inconsistent with federal and state law.

Under Indiana code, each individual charter school is considered to be its own Local Education Agency (LEA). As you are aware, Title I regulations require that "hold harmless" provisions be applied to all LEAs. This provision ensures that no matter what pupil enrollment levels are in a given year, an individual public charter school or a traditional public school in Indiana will not receive less than 85% of the Title I funding it received in the previous year.

Astoundingly, 22 of the 59 charter schools that received Title I funding for FY2016 got less than the 85% guaranteed by the law's "hold harmless" provision. For example, Avondale Meadows' Title I money dropped by \$129,479, or 27%. This is particularly troubling given that no traditional public school corporation experienced similar cuts.

When it comes to allocating funding for our State's most disadvantaged public school students, disbursements should be made as equitably as possible. Unfortunately, it appears that's not happening. Public school students should not be penalized because they chose to attend a public charter school that best fits their educational needs. We urge you to address this discrepancy and explain the formula used to determine these imbalanced funding levels for our public schools.

Sincerely,

Luke Messer
Member of Congress

Todd Rokita
Member of Congress