October 24, 2022

Dear Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, Chairman Smith, and Ranking Member Rogers:

The undersigned 97 national, regional, state and local education organizations and institutions write to urge your support for the inclusion of the Biliteracy Educational Seal and Teaching (BEST) Act in the final, conferenced version of the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Specifically, we request that the Senate agree to recede to the House NDAA’s authorization of the BEST Act.

The BEST Act is a K-12 educational program which, if enacted, would have significant benefits for our nation’s armed forces and all students nationwide. In the nation as a whole and within the military especially, America’s language capacity has reached a breaking point. According to a 2017 American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS) report, only 21.7% of US residents speak a language other than English at home and “only a fraction of this cohort speaks, reads, and comprehends a second language well enough to use it in their everyday lives.” This same language deficit afflicts our military, as well, and represents a real threat to the mission of the US military. Multiple GAO studies have found that our nation’s language deficit could threaten our priorities and missions around the globe.

Launched in California and now adopted in 49 states, Seal of Biliteracy programs offer significant inducements for America’s K-12 students to learn another language – a seal on their diploma or transcript that shows higher education institutions, employers and even the military that they have attained proficiency in English and one other language. Over 20 years of research demonstrates that proficiency in two or more languages positively impacts academic achievement, retention rates, school attendance, graduation rates, grade point averages, rates of matriculation into post-secondary education, employability, earnings, and local and national achievement test scores. These programs have the added benefit of empowering heritage and native speakers of other languages to grow their languages and cultures. Indeed, the Congressionally commissioned AAAS report saw Seal of Biliteracy programs as an important part of the solution to the language crisis and urged states to adopt such programs.

The BEST Act, which the House passed version of NDAA would authorize, directs the Department of Education to award renewable two-year grants to states to establish or improve, and carry out, Seal of Biliteracy programs to recognize student proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in both English and a second language. Further, BEST allows speakers of any official Native American language to use equivalent proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in such language in lieu of proficiency in English.
For all of these reasons, we support the BEST Act and urge you to support its inclusion in the final, conferenced version of the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act.

Sincerely,

National Organizations
Joint National Committee for Languages
National Council for Languages and International Studies
AASA, The School Superintendents Association
ACTFL
American Association for Applied Linguistics
American Association of Teachers of German
American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese
American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS
Association of Language Companies
Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents [ALAS]
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Avant Assessment
Center for Applied Linguistics
Coalition of Community-Based Heritage Language Schools
Computer-Assisted Instruction Consortium (CALICO)
EDGE Consulting Partners
Fluency Consulting LLC
Freestyle Languages
International Association for Language Learning Technology (IALLT)
Latino Leadership Coalition, Inc.
Latinos for Education
MARACAS/Learning Kaleidoscope
National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of English Learner Program Administrators
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Coalition of Native American Language Schools and Programs
National Committee for Latin and Greek
National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL)
National Education Association
National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations
National School Boards Association
TESOL International Association
UnidosUS

State and Regional Organizations
The Alabama World Languages Association
Alaskans for Language Acquisition
Arkansas Foreign Language Teachers Association
California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE)
Californians Together
Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (CSCTFL)
Computer-Assisted Instruction Consortium (CALICO)
DECTFL - Delaware Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
Dual Language Education of New Mexico
Florida Association for Bilingual Education
Foreign Language Association of Georgia (FLAG)
Foreign Language Association of Virginia
Global Virginia
IATLC (Idaho Association of Teachers of Language and Culture)
IFLTA - Indiana Foreign Language Teachers Association
Illinois Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
Kentucky World Language Association
MAFLA - Massachusetts Foreign Language Association
Maryland Foreign Language Teachers Association
Michigan World Language Association
Mississippi Foreign Language Association
Missouri Dual Language Network
Montana Association of Language Teachers
Multistate Association for Bilingual Education-Northeast, Inc.
New Hampshire Association of World Language Teachers
New Jersey Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/New Jersey Bilingual Educators (NJTESOL/NJBE)
New Mexico Organization of Language Educators
New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers (NYSAFLT)
Pacific Northwest Council for Languages (PNCFL)
PSMLA - Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association
Rhode Island College World Languages Education Program
Rhode Island Teachers of English Language Learners (RITELL)
RIFLA - Rhode Island Foreign Language Association
SCFLTA - South Carolina Foreign Language Teachers' Association
Southern Conference on Language Teaching
Southwest Conference on Language Teaching
Texas Foreign Language Association (TFLA)
Vermont Foreign Language Association
Washington Association for Language Teaching (WAFLT)
Washington Association of Bilingual Educators
West Virginia Foreign Language Association
Wisconsin Association for Language Teachers
World Language Initiative – Montana
Wyoming Association of Language Teachers

Local Organizations and Educational Institutions
Alaska
Anchorage School District
California
Center for Equity for English Learners, Loyola Marymount University
Massachusetts
The Amigos School, Cambridge
Kelly Elementary School, Chelsea Public Schools
New Bedford Public Schools
Potter Road Elementary School, Framingham
Salem Public Schools Special Education Department

New Jersey
Montclair State University, Dept. of World Languages and Cultures

Rhode Island
Bishop Hendricken High School, Warwick
Cape Verdean American Community Development Association of Rhode Island
Charette Charter School, Providence
Coalition for a Multilingual Rhode Island
The Greene School, West Greenwich
Narragansett High School
Progreso Latino
Providence Public Schools
University of Rhode Island
Westerly Middle School