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DELAURO: INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION CRITICAL TO AMERICA’S WORKFORCE

Washington, DC— Congresswoman Rosa L. DeLauro (CT-3), Ranking Member on the Labor, Education, Health, and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee, made the following remarks at the Budget Hearing for the Department of Education today.

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Mr. Secretary, for joining us today.

Budgets are an embodiment of more than just our national priorities. They reflect our moral values – what we as a people and a nation hold most dear. As such, I strongly support the decision you and the president have made in making investments in education the top priority in this budget.

Only through education can people better themselves and their communities, keep the promise of opportunity and social mobility for all, and continue to lead the world in innovation and standard of living. As President Obama has said, "countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow."

With that in mind, I applaud the new investments in education you have included in this budget – for example, \$300 million for I-3, \$150 million for Promised Neighborhoods, and \$100 million to increase after-school programs.

I want to particularly thank you for your continued support of early childhood education. This is something the Chairman and I have worked together to emphasize, as co-chairs of the Congressional Baby Caucus.

Study after study has shown, and I know from watching my own grandchildren, that the earliest experiences are essential, and supportive environments critical, to long term outcomes for children.

The business community understands this. Just last week, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke said, and I quote: "The payoffs of early childhood programs can be especially high. For instance, preschool programs for disadvantaged children have been shown to increase high school graduation rates. Because high school graduates have higher earnings, pay more taxes, and are less likely to use public health programs, investing in such programs can pay off even from the narrow perspective of state budgets; of course, the returns to the overall economy and to the individuals themselves are much greater."

So thank you for recognizing the vital importance of early learning in this budget. I do have concerns about some of the other inclusions in this budget request, which I hope we can discuss this afternoon.

For example: I would like to see a bigger commitment to Title I, which aids at-risk children, and IDEA for children with disabilities. These are two fundamental building blocks of our K-12 education system, and resources that school systems rely on desperately to get by.

According to Census data, the number of America's children that live in poverty grew by close to two million during the recession. In 2009, child poverty reached a level of 20.7 percent – a rate of more than one in five and totaling more than 15.5 million children. This makes Title I funding even more important as without these resources, far too many children will not have the supports they need to succeed.

In terms of higher education, I strongly welcome the emphasis you have placed on Pell Grants, and maintaining the maximum award at the current amount of \$5,550. I have been visiting community colleges in my district, and I cannot emphasize enough how important Pell grant support is in helping people of all ages go to school, and now more than ever. Since the recession, the number of students needing Pell grant support to pursue their education has increased by 2.4 million, to almost nine million students.

Many of these students told me not only that Pell Grants were making the difference for them, but that if they lost even \$100 out of the grant, their education and their chances at improving their employment prospects would be put at risk.

That is the knife's edge these men and women are walking on in this economy. And it is one of the many reasons why I oppose the short-sighted cuts in the majority's budget for the remainder of 2011 – to Pell, to Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants and other higher education programs, to Title I and IDEA, and even to Head Start and early education.

If we want to create jobs, grow the economy, and reduce the deficit in the long-term, it does not make sense to roll back our critical investments in education. We should not be slashing the programs that help the middle-class and ensure educational opportunity for all.

So, on behalf of these students in my district, and all across America, I want to thank you and the president for committing to investments in education. It is the right thing to do.

Thank you again for coming today, and I look forward to hearing your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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