

RULES COMMITTEE REFUSES TO ALLOW LARSON AMENDMENT MANDATING FULL FEDERAL FUNDING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

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WASHINGTON, D.C.- The House Rules Committee last night voted not to allow the House to vote on an amendment offered by U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) mandating that the federal government fully fund its 40 percent share of the cost of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education (IDEA) Act. Larson had offered the amendment to H.R. 1350, a bill that reauthorizes the special education program. When IDEA was originally passed in 1975, Congress placed the federal share of the cost at 40 percent. It has never funded more than 17.6 percent.

"By blocking this amendment, the House has been denied the opportunity to even debate this amendment," said Larson. In testimony submitted to the Rules Committee, which determines which amendments are allowed to the floor, Larson stated: "This amendment is based on a bill I have introduced in the last two Congresses which has received bi-partisan support. My amendment would put an end to the embarrassing legacy that the federal government has created for itself in failing to fully fund its share of special education and saddling the states with tens of billions in unfunded mandates. It is a legacy which H.R. 1350 continues and my amendment corrects.

"As you all know, the federal government currently does not meet the financial obligations for special education it committed to in 1975 when the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, which was renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990, was first passed by Congress. This shortfall places an onerous financial burden on local communities who must find alternate resources, such as higher property taxes, to fund special education," said Larson.

Since 1975, Congress has authorized a federal commitment to special education funding at a level of 40 percent of the average per pupil expenditure (APPE) on special education services. However, Congress has only appropriated funds to meet between 5 and 16 percent of the APPE, with fiscal year 2002 appropriations setting a record at 17.6 percent, or about \$8.7 billion. This has resulted in great burdens being placed on school districts. For example, in the 2001-02 school year, the last completed school year, the town of Berlin, Connecticut spent \$4,721,372 on special education, with all but \$361,543 locally funded, far short of the 40 percent commitment.

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