

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

March 8, 2018

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Organizations Representing Military Families, Native American Students and Public Schools Oppose Bills to Repurpose Impact Aid as Education Savings Accounts

(WASHINGTON, DC) -- The National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS), the National Military Family Association (NMFA) and the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) oppose House and Senate versions of the Education Savings Accounts for Military Families Act of 2018 -- bills that would undermine public schools, jeopardize the education of students and increase the taxpayer burden. The bills would fundamentally change the purpose of Impact Aid from a tax reimbursement that supports an entire community to an education savings account, a voucher scheme that offers minimal accountability over taxpayer dollars or protections for students and families.

NAFIS, NMFA and NIEA urge Congress to say no to these bills.

“These bills are a bad deal for families, students and taxpayers,” said NAFIS Executive Director Hilary Goldmann. “Diverting Impact Aid funding from public schools will undermine the education and support systems for federally connected students – children of service men and women and students who live on Indian lands - and disregards taxpayers. Impact Aid funds are targeted to school districts with the highest concentrations of students and local tax effort. Any analysis that suggests these bills will have a minimal impact fails to understand school district budgeting and financing and the extent to which some communities are impacted by the federal government. These bills turn this approach on its head, siphoning funds to a select few.”

Impact Aid is a partnership between local communities and the Federal Government where there is significant nontaxable property, such as military installations, Indian treaty or trust land, low-rent housing facilities, national parks and laboratories. Turning Impact Aid into an ESA reneges on the Federal Government’s responsibility to local taxpayers in federally impacted school districts and would financially hamstring the schools tasked with educating students in these communities.

“Impact Aid is a vital resource for local public schools, which serve the vast majority of our Nation’s 550,000 school-age military children,” said National Military Family Association Executive Director Joyce Raezer. “While the idea of a voucher for military-connected kids might be appealing on the surface, using Impact Aid to fund such a program is a bad deal for military families and a disaster for public schools across the country. We owe military families the assurance that their schools receive the resources to provide the quality education our military children need and deserve.”

“Impact Aid is a critical part of the Congressional obligation to fulfill the Federal trust responsibility for Native students—it compensates school districts for Indian treaty and trust lands that cannot be taxed,” said Ahniwake Rose, Executive Director of the National Indian Education Association. “We oppose this legislation because it would undermine funding for Impact Aid for all students who benefit from the program, starting with students from military families and including Native students. The proposal also fails to provide adequately for tribal consultation, which is essential for NIEA and tribes across the country. We stand in strong support of keeping the program intact so it can provide the funding to hire the teachers, provide the supplies, and operate the schools necessary to effectively educate Native students and all the students who benefit from this essential program.”

“Impact Aid works,” said Goldmann. “A better way to support military-connected students would be to fully fund the Impact Aid program.”

The National Association of Federally Impacted Schools is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association of school districts located across the United States. Founded more than 40 years ago, the association works to ensure the needs of the federally impacted school districts, and the children they educate, are met through adequate Federal funds.

The National Military Family Association is the leading nonprofit dedicated to serving the families who stand behind the uniform. Since 1969, NMFA has worked to strengthen and protect millions of families through its advocacy and programs. They provide spouse scholarships, camps for military kids, and retreats for families reconnecting after deployment and for the families of the wounded, ill, or injured. NMFA serves the families of the currently serving, veterans, retired, wounded or fallen members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Commissioned Corps of the USPHS and NOAA.

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) was formed by Native educators in 1969 to encourage a national discourse on Native education. For 47 years, NIEA has hosted an annual convention to provide a forum for collaboration. NIEA adheres to the organization’s founding principles - to bring Native educators together to explore ways to improve schools and the education of Native children; to promote the maintenance and continued development of Native languages and cultures; and to develop and implement strategies for influencing local, state, and federal policy and policymakers.

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