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Institute of Museum and Library Services Act (1996): Correspondence 01

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND
HUMAN RESOURCES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

July, 1996

Dear Colleague:

I am writing you in regard to a matter of considerable concern, the House-Senate Conference on H.R. 1617, the Workforce Development legislation. I was an enthusiastic and strong supporter of the Senate bill both in Committee and on the Senate floor. In fact, I was the only Democrat to vote to report the bill out of the Labor Committee.

I supported Senator Kassebaum's legislation because it contained both a much-needed overhaul and consolidation of our job training programs and some very strong adult and vocational education provisions. The Senate approved a very good bill. Unfortunately, that bill was severely weakened in conference with the House.

Since my primary concern was with the education provisions, I have carefully weighed the Conference agreement with current law to determine which would be better. I have regretfully concluded that it would be better to stick with current law, and I thought you might want to know how I reached this decision.

First, the within state formula that allocates vocational education funds among local school districts or area vocational schools has been weakened. I fear that areas with scarce resources and high needs could well lose funds under the formula approved in Conference. An alternative, better targeted formula was offered and rejected. The enclosed state charts shows how some key areas would fare when the alternative formula proposal is compared with the Conference agreement. Both heavily urban and isolated rural areas would suffer.

Second, the language that required that area vocational schools with large numbers of disadvantaged and special education students would receive first priority has been removed. This endangers targeting funds to area vocational schools that have the greatest need.

Third, the requirement that states spend at least some money on vocational education in correctional institutions has become permissive. I fully understand the corrections education is not a widely popular endeavor, and I am very concerned that states will curtail the very small amount they are now spending in

this area. These are funds that do not flow to the education of hardened criminals. Quite to the contrary, funds often go to detention facilities to help troubled youth straighten out their lives and become productive, law-abiding citizens. It would be a tragedy if this activity came to a halt.

Fourth, the widely popular School to Work program would be repealed, and there would be no requirement for states to invest in this critically important area. If we are concerned about adequately preparing young people for the job market, it is essential that the classroom be linked to the workplace. Leaving this as an option and not a requirement is, to my mind, insufficient.

Unfortunately, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that it would be best to lay this legislation aside, retain current vocational and adult education law, and let the next Congress begin the reform process anew. The need to reform our education and training programs is overwhelming, but so is the need for us to do the best job we can, and I am afraid that the Conference agreement falls short of the mark.

With warm regards,

Ever sincerely,

Claiborne Pell
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Education,
Arts, and Humanities