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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

CHAIRMAN, CONGRESSIONAL EXECUTIVE
COMMISSION ON CHINA

CHAIRMAN, GLOBAL HEALTH, GLOBAL
HUMAN RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

CO-CHAIRMAN, TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION

SENIOR MEMBER, HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE

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March 31, 2023

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
H-307, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
H-307, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
2358-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Quigley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member Quigley,

I write to respectfully request Community Project Funding in fiscal year 2024 to fund the *Wheelchair Accessible Special Needs Playground Renovation* at the School for Children with Hidden Intelligence (SCHI) located at 34 Oak Street, Lakewood, New Jersey 08701 in my Congressional District (NJ-04).

SCHI is a nonprofit educational institution providing care for severely-developmentally delayed, medically fragile, and socially and emotionally challenged children and young adults. Students present with disabilities such as autism, Down syndrome, ADHD, muscular dystrophy, Spina bifida, and cerebral palsy, among others. Every child and young adult at the school participates in intensive, individualized therapy to improve balance, coordination, strength, and sensory-motor integration. The results of these therapies are further reinforced when students apply the skills they have learned on the school's Wheelchair Accessible Special Needs Playground. Through therapy and playground usage, students also improve confidence and independence with daily activities like self-care, feeding and dressing, body awareness, motor skills, balance, and coordination, leading to more positive outcomes in the immediate and long-term.

The Wheelchair Accessible Playground has already helped provide the gift of mobility to over 1,000 children and young adults over the past 15 years. However, the number of children at

the school has grown exponentially due to the high rate of children with special needs in New Jersey. For example, in its most recent report, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) acknowledged that New Jersey's rate of children on the Autism Spectrum Disorder exceeds the national average. Furthermore, though the school's students come from a number of area towns, many live in the state's fourth-largest city, Lakewood, which is an Urban Enterprise Zone.

By removing ill-fitting and broken rubberized material, as well as eliminating architectural barriers which currently restrict the mobility and accessibility of this fast-growing handicapped student population, this renovation project is expected to double the number of severely disabled and underprivileged children who are able to participate in this play environment where isolation is decreased, and socialization increased.

The Wheelchair Accessible Special Needs Playground Renovation is an appropriate use of taxpayer funds as it is in keeping with the stated goals of the Community Development Block Grant program by meeting one of the three statutorily defined national objectives to principally benefit low- and moderate-income persons, as many of the students live in an Urban Enterprise Zone and meets a compelling local need for education and workforce development training for individuals with physical and developmental disabilities. This program has a federal nexus because the funding provided is for purposes authorized by Chapter 42 U.S.C. Section 5305(a)(4).

The total project cost of the project is \$510,000, however this request is for \$380,000. The remainder of \$130,000 will be provided through in-kind contributions.

This project enjoys considerable community support from local social service agencies, as well as municipal, county and state officials.

I certify that neither I nor my immediate family has any financial interest in this project.

Thank you in advance for your careful consideration of my request for assistance for the SCHI Wheelchair Accessible Special Needs Playground Renovation. I appreciate the Committee's due consideration of the proposal.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress