May 9, 2003

Dear Member of Congress:

The undersigned groups representing general and special educators, families, and the disability community are writing to express our views and concern with the US Department of Education's proposal to dismantle the 16 ERIC Clearinghouses. We would also request that you contact both Secretary Rod Paige and Jeff Halsted in the Department of Education, and let them know of our concerns as well.

We were very pleased to see in the President’s FY 2004 budget request for the US Department of Education that he proposes to continue the ERIC Clearinghouse system. Through educators and families direct experience with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, (ERIC EC), we can personally attest to the great benefits this system provides to educators, policy makers and parents alike.

We are deeply disappointed to learn, however, that in the recently published draft Scope of Work for the next round of competitions for the system, the Education Department has chosen to dismantle the current 16 Clearinghouses, including the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education. We strongly urge the Education Department to reconsider this approach and reinstate the highly effective services we have come to expect. Topical clearinghouses not only enable the public to take full advantage of expertise wherever it might be located throughout the country, but also promote personalized customer service, more consumer choices and better access to a broad base of information to teachers, researchers, and families, especially those who have children with disabilities or who are gifted.

We believe that ERIC should be positioned as an essential multi-media knowledge base that directly supports the Department of Education’s fourth goal in its strategic plan to transform education into an evidence-based field. We applaud the Department for this ambitious goal and we hope that it recognizes the critical role that ERIC should assume in this challenging transformation.

We are sure you will agree that, in the wake of the No Child Left Behind Act and the recent passage of the Education Sciences Reform Act, the need has never been greater for our teachers and parents to have ready access to a comprehensive knowledge base on education. The ERIC system is a vital part of our nationwide effort to leave no child behind.

We look forward to hearing from you soon about these strong suggestions for modifying the Scope of Work.

Sincerely,