

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

August 28, 2020

Governor Ron DeSantis  
State of Florida  
The Capitol  
400 South Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor DeSantis,

Families want their children to safely return to school to learn and socialize, thereby enabling working parents to return to work. With that in mind, we write to express our vigorous opposition to recent actions taken by your administration that have had the consequence of transferring the decision of school reopening from the Palm Beach County School Board to the Palm Beach County Commission. This impairs both bodies as they make important decisions.

The Palm Beach County School Board is the elected local government body that has been immersed in the very complicated issues of school reopening. After many months of deliberation, with input from parents, students, teachers, service providers, education and health experts, they submitted a thoughtful plan of school reopening that included both virtual and brick and mortar opportunities.

Their plan was rejected by Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran with the threat that state education funding would be withheld if the plan was not revised to require full brick and mortar reopening upon Palm Beach County entering Phase 2 in its pandemic response, a decision that will be made by the Palm Beach County Commission (or possibly by you, the Governor). With due respect to our County Commission, their attention has correctly been on how to safely reopen businesses and public areas that come under their responsibility, not on how to safely reopen schools. They are now saddled with the burden that even a slight entry into Phase 2 reopening for local businesses will have dramatic consequence on students, teachers, parents and everyone connected with the school system. This is wrong.

Congress passed the *CARES Act* in March, which included over \$30 billion to help schools address the extraordinary challenges presented by the pandemic. As Congress works to provide additional funding, threatening to cut off money to our local school system adds an unnecessary impediment to getting the critical resources needed to pay our teachers and staff and to enable schools to provide a safe and quality education to our South Florida families during this unprecedented time.

Sadly, we have seen elsewhere the dire consequences of schools reopening too quickly and being unprepared to react when students and teachers get infected – causing schools to return to distance learning options and forced large scale quarantines. We do not want that to happen here.

On August 24, Circuit Judge Charles Dodson ruled that your administration's order on reopening schools is unconstitutional because it arbitrarily disregards safety, denies local school board decision making with respect to reopening brick and mortar schools, and conditions funding on an approved reopening plan with a start day in August. We urge you to consider Judge Dodson's guidance and protect, rather than undermine, our constituents' constitutional guarantees to due process and safe schools.

While in-person schooling should be our goal, the Florida Constitution requires school reopening decisions be made by the local school board and should be guided by local conditions and scientific data, not threats of severe financial penalties. We respectfully and urgently ask that you pull back the threat of defunding and allow the school board to proceed at a pace they determine to be safe and conducive to learning.

Sincerely,



LOIS FRANKEL  
Member of Congress



TED DEUTCH  
Member of Congress



ALCEE HASTINGS  
Member of Congress

\s\  
LORI BERMAN  
Florida State Senator

\s\  
DAVID SILVERS  
Florida State Representative

\s\  
KEVIN RADER  
Florida State Senator

\s\  
MATT WILLHITE  
Florida State Representative

\s\  
JOE CASELLO  
Florida State Representative

\s\  
TINA POLSKY  
Florida State Representative

CC: Palm Beach County School Board  
Palm Beach County Commission  
Palm Beach County Superintendent