
VALUE Suggests Alternatives to Closing NIFL

May 18, 2009 ... President Obama sent his budget recommendation to Congress on May 7, 2009. In it, he proposed to close the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), saying that it "has had minimal success in fulfilling its mission to coordinate literacy services across the federal government." His plan is to have the Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) assume responsibility for national literacy leadership.

On May 14, 2009, VALUE Board President Faye Combs and Executive Director Marty Finsterbusch sent a letter to President Obama urging him to reconsider this plan. The letter acknowledges NIFL ineffectiveness over the past 8 years, but respectfully asserts that OVAE should not be responsible for interagency coordination.

The letter states "Eliminating NIFL likely will result in the devaluation of adult literacy, relegating it to a minor concern within a single department." The letter suggests three alternatives:

- Reconstitute NIFL as it was originally intended in the National Literacy Act of 1991
 - Create a new similar institute with a new mandate and completely new staff and board
 - Assign the duties of NIFL to a truly cross-agency working group with staff from the Departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, the Domestic Policy Office, and other appropriate departments and agencies, under the auspices of the Domestic Policy Office
- Copies of the letter were transmitted to:
- Secretary Duncan, U.S. Department of Education
 - Secretary Solis, U.S. Department of Labor
 - Secretary Sebelius, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
 - Senator Kennedy, Chair of Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
 - Rep. Miller, Chair of Committee on Education and Labor
 - Melody Barnes, White House Domestic Policy Advisor
 - Peter Orszag, Director of the Office of Management and Budget