June 15, 2009

President Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest professional organization of teachers, administrators, parents, and others concerned with the education of children with disabilities, gifts and talents, or both. CEC is committed to the achievement of successful outcomes for children and youth with disabilities, through the promotion of professional excellence in special education and the provision of high quality professional supports and quality conditions for teaching and learning.

On behalf of our 40,000 members, we appreciate your commitment to special education and as outlined in your White House agenda for students with disabilities. We are also pleased with your call to maintain very high standards for charter schools, and we write to address this challenge.

We agree charter schools are at their best when they serve as centers of innovation and are held to the same high level of accountability as traditional public schools. Data demonstrates, however, that charter schools tend to overlook and under serve children with disabilities allowing them to fall behind. Charter schools have the same obligations as traditional public schools to provide students with disabilities a free appropriate public education, as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Yet they are rarely aware of these requirements and often fail to enroll or accept students with disabilities.

To eliminate this achievement gap, and encourage charter schools to reach their full potential, CEC urges you to include children with disabilities and the professionals who work on their behalf in all of your charter school initiatives and proposals.

To the extent CEC may be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at debz@cec.sped.org or 703-264-9406. Thank you again for your efforts to provide all children with the education they deserve.

Sincerely,

Deborah A. Ziegler, Ed.D.
Associate Executive Director
Policy and Advocacy Services

cc: Secretary Duncan
    Kareem Dale
    Roberto Rodriguez
    Patty Guard