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Citizens Advisory Committee

TO THE CHESAPEAKE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

June 21, 2013

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary, U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

We want to share a copy of a letter that the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) recently sent to the Chesapeake Executive Council regarding the Obama Administration's proposed STEM education restructuring plan and to ask your help in advancing the environmental literacy of the 3.5 million K-12 students in the six states and the District of Columbia which constitute the Chesapeake watershed.

The Citizens Advisory Committee -- known under the acronym CAC -- is a broad-based citizens' organization appointed by the Governors of Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia, the Mayor of the District of Columbia and the Board of Directors of the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. Established in 1984, CAC provides advice and assistance to the Chesapeake Executive Council (comprised of the region's Governors, the Chesapeake Bay Commission and the Administrator of the EPA) in implementing Chesapeake Bay restoration plans and goals.

Among CAC's top priorities is enhancing the environmental literacy of the 17 million citizens who live and work in the watershed, and particularly our youth. We have been strong advocates for NOAA's Chesapeake Bay Watershed Education and Training (BWET) Program -- which provides much-needed federal assistance to support State and local education agencies and their partners in carrying out the environmental education goals and commitments established by the Executive Council. We believe that the U.S. Department of Education has a vital role to play in helping States in the watershed achieve their environmental education goals.

Jessica M. Blackburn, CAC Coordinator

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We commend you for the steps the Department has recently taken to begin rectifying the agency's "*absence*" from environmental education through the Green Ribbon Schools Initiative and the proposal to Congress to establish a new "Well-Rounded" competitive grant program, but believe that much more can be done:

- The U.S. Department of Education has many types of assistance such as formula and competitive grants which can be helpful in advancing the education commitments contained in the Chesapeake Bay Agreements and Chesapeake Executive Order #13508. The agency can work with State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) in the watershed to ensure that those grant opportunities are not limited or restricted in ways which discourage SEAs and LEAs from applying for them to support their environmental literacy efforts.
- Environmental education, which is "*...a proven way to expand the academic pipeline for STEM subjects...*" according to the Science Director of Brown University and strongly endorsed by the National Science Teachers Association, can be integrated into the President's proposed STEM education reorganization. It currently is not as noted in the attached letter.
- The U.S. Department of Education can join with 28 other Federal agencies or sub-cabinet level agencies which have signed formal Memoranda of Understanding with EPA to cooperate in Bay restoration efforts. It is one of the few Federal agencies which has not signed a commitment to assist and collaborate in the restoration and protection of the Watershed – despite precedents, regionally and nationally, for the Department to do so.

By implementing these steps, we believe that the Department will advance its mission of promoting student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness, while also advancing the restoration of what the President himself described as a "National Treasure." Your attention to this matter is appreciated and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. John Dawes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "R. John" and last name "Dawes" clearly distinguishable.

R. John Dawes
Chair, Citizens Advisory Committee

CC: Keith A. Anderson, Director, District Department of the Environment, Chair PSC
Jeff Corbin, Senior Advisor on the Chesapeake Bay, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Nick DiPasquale, Director, EPA Chesapeake Bay Program