



STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Michael Sentance, J.D., LL.M.
State Superintendent of Education

February 21, 2017

Alabama
State Board
of Education

Governor
Robert Bentley
President

Jackie Ziegler
District I

Betty Peters
District II

Stephanie Bell
District III

Yvette M. Richardson, Ed.D.
District IV
Vice President

Ella B. Bell
District V

Cynthia McCarty, Ph.D.
District VI

Jeff Newman
District VII

Mary Scott Hunter, J.D.
District VIII
President Pro Tem

Michael Sentance, J.D., LL.M.
Secretary and
Executive Officer

Mr. John M. Tyson, Jr.
Helping Families Initiative
Volunteers of America Southeast
600 Azalea Road
Mobile, AL 36609

Dear Mr. Tyson:

I am delighted to provide for you this letter of support endorsing the Helping Families Initiative (HFI). It is my belief that this program holds great promise for education in Alabama and is critical to the success of providing a quality education for our citizens, the economic development of our state, and the safety of our communities.

Your unique experiences of having served on the Alabama State Board of Education and as District Attorney of the 13th Judicial Circuit in Mobile have given you a keen insight into the issues that face educators and law enforcement. As you have stated many times, "By the time law enforcement gets involved, it's too little and too late. The crime has already been committed." We agree.

While the Alabama State Department of Education addresses many of the issues of troubled youth through our programs such as Safe and Drug Free Schools, we know that at the core of these issues is a child and family in trouble. We recognize that our work with students alone is not enough to get the job done. All too often it is the issues that face a child, the family or the neighborhood that must be addressed if education services are to be effectively delivered.

We also recognize that truancy and bad behavior at school are forecasters of difficulty. As any teacher will tell you, if the children are not in the school, it makes no difference what our curriculum is or how dedicated our faculty is — if the students are not present and behaving, we cannot help them. Their futures are in jeopardy, and they will likely be trouble with the law. The HFI creates community partnerships that deal directly with these problems.

Alabama's laws require that educators report truancy to the district attorneys. HFI provides a systematic structure for these reports to occur. That then enables the district attorney to leverage the power of the entire community to change the problematic behaviors whatever the causes may be. The family assessment, the individualized intervention plan, the multi-disciplinary team representing local agencies and the referrals to service providers all work together to resolve child, family, and neighborhood problems before they lead to involvement in either the juvenile or adult criminal justice systems.

Please know that we fully support the HFI, and we will work with you throughout the state to accomplish our mutual goals of educating each child to their fullest capacity, providing a world class educated workforce, and to making our communities safer from the problems of future juvenile and adult crime.

Sincerely,

Michael Sentance
State Superintendent of Education

MS:LAK