

# Rights Unit Hits Finch On Schools Decision

The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights accused the Nixon Administration yesterday of knuckling under to southern school districts that have refused to desegregate.

In a statement signed by its chairman, Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP, the Conference said Wednesday's settlement of five southern school cases by Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Robert H. Finch "is bound to stimulate new violations of a law overwhelmingly passed by Congress."

However, Sen. Edward W. Brooke (R-Mass.) issued a statement last night commending Finch for his "affirmative action," which the Negro Senator called "eminently fair (and) in the true spirit of the law."

Southerners in Congress, other than Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), who praised Finch Wednesday night, were cautious in their comments yesterday.

Finch ratified on Wednesday an order issued by his predecessor, Wilbur J. Cohen, cutting off Federal funds to five school districts—one in North Carolina, two in South Carolina and two in Mississippi—that have not desegregated.

But he amended the order,

promising the districts they could have the lost money back if they came up with "acceptable plans" within 60 days, and sending out special teams to negotiate with them.

Leon Panetta, an assistant to Finch, told reporters yesterday that the Administration will cut off funds as a final resort in school desegregation cases, though it will first try to get results without "pointing a gun" at offending districts. Panetta said Finch believes he has "leeway as far as approaches, but not as far as the ends, are concerned."

The Leadership Conference noted that HEW had already negotiated at length and without result with the five offending districts.

It expressed the fear that Finch's compromise "will encourage disregard for the school desegregation laws, embitter students and parents who have seen those laws bring little . . . and strengthen southern school officials in their resolve to keep segregation."