

April 13, 2017

Senator Thad Cochran
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Nita Lowey
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Roy Blunt
Chair, Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Tom Cole
Chair, House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Senate LHHS Appropriations
SubCommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House LHHS Appropriations
SubCommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations for Fiscal Years 2017- 2018

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, representing more than 13,000 school system leaders across the country, I write today to express our strong continued support for federal investment in education that is premised on prioritizing support for and strengthening of our nation's public schools. As your respective committees move forward with both final considerations for FY2017 and initial efforts for FY2018, we write to emphasize the importance on providing robust PreK-12 investments to the schools that serve our nation's 50 million public school students.

Every Student Succeeds Act: Your chambers worked in an overwhelmingly bipartisan manner less than 18 months ago to pass the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. FY17 allocations are the funds that will support the first year of ESSA implementation, and it is critical that the funding you provide in FY17 supports the new law. Congress must follow its strong bipartisan support for authorizing statute with adequate funding levels. In particular, it is critical to ensure a Title I allocation that ensures at least level funding to school districts. Through a confluence of policy changes in statute—including an increase in the mandatory state set aside, the elimination of a hold-harmless provision, and the rollover of School Improvement Grant (SIG) program dollars to the base formula—anything less than an increase will result in cuts at the local level, a reality we flagged for you in an related letter signed by 12 national organizations (dated April 13 2017). We are also deeply concerned with the potentially low allocation to the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (Title IV). Title IV helps provide well-rounded education opportunities for all students, and we believe the program should receive a high allocation, at a level robust enough to support meaningful formula-driven

distribution. As a brand new program, FY17 is the first opportunity Congress has to fund a program it so widely supported. The funding level of FY17 will become what we work from in our years, and we are deeply concerned that a low allocation will not only limit the ability of all schools and students to receive funding, but for the program—with significant structural improvements and flexibilities—to have a reasonable shot at success.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Congress must also take action to preserve and support investment in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA is the major—but not sole—vehicle for providing education to students with disabilities. In fact, students with disabilities are general education students first, with nearly two-thirds of students with disabilities spending at least 80 percent of their time in a general education setting. Investing in IDEA demonstrates that Congress is serious in meeting its commitment to helping school districts support all students. The number proposed by the administration would freeze IDEA funding, locking in a federal share at 16 percent of the additional cost associated with educating students with disabilities (well below the authorized 40 percent) and a commitment to continued encroachment on state and local education dollars. We strongly support Congress prioritizing increased funding for IDEA and taking steps to ensure a significant increase for IDEA in the upcoming FY17 appropriations conversation, and using that appropriately adjusted funding level as the basis for further increased investment in FY18.

Funding Caps and Non-Defense Discretionary Funding: The success of our nation is shaped by the success of our public schools and the students they serve. We strongly urge Congress to support negotiations that not only maintain parity between defense and non-defense discretionary funding, but also raise the caps on non-defense discretionary funding, even beyond those of the 2015 Bipartisan Budget Act. It is vital that the non-defense discretionary and defense caps be raised by an equal amount to ensure that we have the resources necessary to ensure security and opportunity for students, their families, and our nation. Continuing the caps only increases and exacerbates the pressure on subcommittee allocations and continues to tie the hands of appropriators to more adequately invest in education.

FY 2018: In response to the President's FY2018 budget proposal, we are deeply opposed to a funding approach premised on deep cuts to education programs, the depths of which are only exacerbated when we consider that every single new dollar proposed for K12 funding supports privatization. This proposal would harm our nation's global competitiveness and economic future by completely undermining progress on improving student achievement, closing achievement gaps and increasing high school graduation and post-secondary education attendance. The budget priorities we support for 2018 are consistent with those of 2017: we urge Congress to act in a bipartisan manner to support increased investment in education, including prioritization of flagship formula programs (like ESSA Title I, IDEA and Perkins Career/Technical Education); to oppose program eliminations like those proposed for ESSA Title II and 21st Century Community Learning Centers; and to ensure all students and all schools are equipped for educational success.

We look forward to working with you in the final stages of FY17 negotiations, throughout the FY18 effort, and stand ready to provide additional information as necessary.

Sincerely,



Noelle Ellerson Ng
Associate Executive Director
AASA, The School Superintendents Association

CC: Senate Appropriations LHHS Subcommittee
House Appropriations LHHS Subcommittee