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July 13, 2017

Representative Tom Cole
Chairman, House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives,

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 continued support for federal investment in education that is premised on prioritizing support for and strengthening of our nation's public schools. As such, we must express our concern with the proposed FY18 LHHS appropriations bill being considered by your committee this afternoon.

We applaud the ongoing effort to return the federal appropriations process to more normal order. We are concerned, however, that the proposed allocations, investments and cuts are deeply damaging to our nation's schools and the students they serve. We are familiar with and aware of the very real budget caps under which the appropriations committee must operate. That said, rather than continuing to make deep cuts to comply with budget caps, and as we wrote in our April letter, *"We strongly urge Congress to ... 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."*

AASA recently launched its 'I Love Public Education' campaign, to highlight the opportunities and successes of our nation's public schools. As the premier national organization representing the school superintendents who run the school systems, we have a responsibility to advocate for adequate and equitable federal investment. The FY18 bill you are considering provides increases—although marginal—to programs that prioritize students and communities in need, including IDEA, ESSA Title IV, Impact Aid and Head Start. We appreciate you making these increases and level funding certain other programs (including ESSA Title I).

While it is true that President Trump's FY18 budget proposal is 'dead on arrival' on Capitol Hill, and that the bill being considered today does reject the depths of his draconian cuts, we would be out of line to say we are pleased with level funding or marginal increases. His budget may be dead, but the skeleton approach of bare-bones funding and damaging cuts lives on. We will not accept the idea that by merely being 'less bad', this appropriations bill is 'good'. We will measure investment in education and kids based on what program and student need is, and this bill misses that mark. We know that FY16 allocations to the department of education were below that of 2010, that FY17 made even deeper cuts, and that this proposal lowers the bar even further.

The proposed cuts will impact schools across the country by erasing funding that supports more than 8,000 educator jobs; that helps keep class sizes down; that supports after-school programs; and that helps develop our teacher workforce. It is a continuation of failed policy that assumes school systems have an unending ability to make due with less, or that state and local coffers can readily offset these cuts.

Congress has made great strides in federal education policy reauthorizations in recent years and stands to reauthorize other programs this term. Strong bi-partisan authorizing language like this is only one-half of the work: Congress must invest in the programs it creates and supports, to ensure that state and local education agencies and broader stakeholders are able to successfully bring the federal program to life.

We appreciate you considering this letter as you prepare to vote on this FY18 bill and we look forward to working with you to ensure a more robust federal allocation for education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Noelle Ellerson Ng". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

CC: House Appropriations Committee, LHHS Subcommittee