

May 3, 2017

Dear Member of Congress,

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 such, we need to detail the areas of the proposed FY17 omnibus—set for vote later this afternoon—that give us pause, along with those that we support.

We applaud Congress' bipartisan effort and work to return the federal appropriations process to more normal order, considering an omnibus bill—with deliberate, nuanced changes—as opposed to continued reliance on continuing resolutions. We know this bill represents bipartisan negotiations in a tight fiscal climate and that current fiscal caps inhibit further investment. That said 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."*

The FY17 bill you are considering provides increases—although marginal—to programs that prioritize students and communities in need, including Title I, IDEA, Impact Aid, head start and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers. We applaud these funding priorities and ask Congress to build upon these investments in FY18.

There are areas of the bill that leave room for improvement:

- We are opposed to the deep cut to Title II of ESSA. President Trump proposes to eliminate Title II in FY18, and while we strongly support efforts by Congress to not eliminate Title II in FY17, we do not subscribe to the idea that bad policy—like this cut to Title II—is suddenly acceptable merely because a worse proposal exists. ESSA is premised on the idea of equity and focused on ensuring all students have access to highly effective teachers. We know that not all teachers are immediately highly effective, and Title II is a critical bridge to building and supporting teacher development.
- We strongly urge Congress to revise the omnibus to include funding for the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS/Forest Counties). As a direct result of Congressional inaction, 775 Counties and over 4,400 schools serving 9 million students in 41 states now directly face budget cuts that will impact education programs and services for students. Without immediate Congressional action on forest management and SRS, forest counties and schools face the loss of irreplaceable essential fire, police, road and bridge, community and educational services.
- We are deeply disappointed to see the omnibus reauthorizes a private voucher program in Washington D.C. and encourage closer consideration of ensuring that federal dollars are targeted on supporting all students, and on programs that are proven effective. The most recent USED study on the DC voucher program found that students entering the voucher program fail to perform as well as their peers remaining in the public school system, and we welcome an explanation for federal support for a floundering program.

As you pivot to the FY18 appropriations process, it is imperative that Congress dismiss the draconian cuts proposed by the administration. Their 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. 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 the FY17 omnibus. We look forward to working with you to ensure a more robust federal allocation for education in FY18.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Noelle Ellerson Ng". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "N" at the beginning.

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