June 24, 2015

Dear Appropriations Committee Member:

The Committee for Education Funding (CEF), a coalition of 118 national education associations and institutions spanning early learning to postgraduate education, writes to express our strong opposition to the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill as reported from subcommittee.

The fundamental problem with this bill, as well as other appropriations bills, is that they are based on the sequester level cap, which in the aggregate essentially freezes funding for nondefense discretionary (NDD) programs. The only way to provide education and related programs with the investments they so desperately need is for Congress to reach a bipartisan agreement that raises the caps, similar to the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 that was negotiated by Sen. Murray and Rep. Paul Ryan. Due to the virtual FY 2016 freeze on NDD and the fact that the committee increased funding for several other subcommittees, this bill required a cut of $3.6 billion below the FY 2015 level.

While we appreciate that Subcommittee Chairman Blunt and the subcommittee provided increases for a small number of education programs including Head Start ($100 million), Title I ($125 million), and IDEA State grants ($125 million), overall the bill sharply reduces funding for education programs by $1.7 billion. Compared to the President’s budget, it cuts the Department of Education by $5.3 billion.

The bill eliminates ten education programs including striving readers, preschool development grants, Investing in Innovation, school leadership, the physical education program, First in the World, and the Child Care Access Means Parents in School program.

In addition, it cuts funding for more than 40 other programs, including School Improvement State grants ($56 million), Teacher Quality State grants ($103 million), 21st century community learning centers ($117 million), elementary and secondary school counseling ($27 million), English Language Acquisition ($25 million), adult education State grants ($29 million), Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants ($29 million), and Federal Work-Study ($40 million).

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Further it rescinds $300 million for FY 2015 Pell grant funding. While this will not adversely affect the Pell grant maximum award for the 2016-17 school year, it will likely result in a Pell funding shortfall in FY 2017.

Several other education programs are frozen including Impact Aid, rural education, TRIO and GEAR UP.

The need to increase the federal investment in education has never been greater. Jobs and the economy are directly linked to and enhanced by such investments. Both unemployment rates and lifetime earnings are closely connected to levels of education attainment.

Solving our nation’s fiscal situation and reducing the debt can’t and won’t happen simply by slashing education and other nondefense discretionary spending. We urge you to reject this bill and instead to start bipartisan negotiations that raise the caps on NDD spending so that the Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee receives a larger allocation that will allow it to produce a bill that invests in education and our nation’s future.

Sincerely,

Noelle Ellerson
President

Joel Packer
Executive Director