

September 13, 2018

Dear FY2019 Labor, Health, and Human Services and Education Appropriations Conferees,

The undersigned national organizations—representing millions of parents, educators, administrators and school-employed mental health professionals—would like to thank you for your work on the FY2019 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (LHHS) Appropriations bills. Our organizations are pleased with the legislation’s increased investment in programs to support public education. However, we remain gravely concerned that the bills do not include language to clarify and ensure that Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) program funds under Title IV-A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) cannot be used to purchase guns or provide firearm training for educators. The Title IV-A is intended to help schools provide students with important resources and direct services—such as comprehensive mental health programs—as well as drug, violence and bullying prevention programs. Using this program to put guns in schools would run counter to its intended use of promoting a safe and healthy school climate.

We recognize there is limited time to prohibit use of Title IV-A funds for firearms in the FY2019 LHHS appropriations bill, however our organizations want to remain on record in staunch opposition to the use of these funds in this way. Title IV-A is intended to provide direct access to mental health and violence prevention programs, not the one-time purchase of equipment, including firearms. Our organizations have significant experience and understanding of best practices in creating safer school environments and we support the use of evidence-based research when making critical policy decisions. There is no conclusive research or evidence to indicate that arming teachers will make schools safer. On the contrary, research does indicate that the over-hardening of schools diminishes school safety and has a negative impact on school climate.

The call for gun-free campuses has not only been echoed by millions of concerned parents and educators around the country, but by current law as well. In ESEA section 4102(5)(B), Congress defines the “Drug and Violence Prevention” program in Title IV-A as a program that seeks to establish “the creation and maintenance of a school environment that is free of weapons.”¹ Additionally, the bipartisan Stop School Violence Prevention and Mental Health Training Program which was included in the enacted FY2018 omnibus appropriations bill ensures “no amounts provided as a grant under this part may be used for provision to any person of a firearm or training in the use of a firearm.”² Congress has made clear through federal law that federal funds should not be used for the purchase of firearms.

Our organizations strongly oppose to the use of Title IV-A funding to arm teachers, and we urge you to work with your colleagues in Congress to provide a permanent legislative fix to prohibit the

¹ Elementary and Secondary Education Act, section 4102(5)(B)

² H.R. 1625 – Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018

use of Title IV-A funds to purchase firearms, and for that matter any federal grant program.

We want to work with you to create certainty that federal funds cannot be used for firearms and encourage you to look to language in the recently-passed Stop School Violence Prevention and Mental Health Training Program as your model to address this issue. Teachers and administrators are in schools to educate our children and should not be acting as armed security in classrooms.

We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss ways to enact a legislative solution. Our organizations look forward to working together with you to provide a solution.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of Teachers
American School Counselor Association
Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials (International)
Council of Administrators of Special Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Association
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
School Social Work Association of America