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May 2, 2017

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the three million members of the National Education Association (NEA), and the students they serve, we write to offer our views on the FY 2017 Omnibus funding bill. Despite including nominal increases for a handful of critical education programs, overall, this bill cuts discretionary education funding by \$1.1 billion, a stark reminder that rigid budget caps continue to prevent the investment in our nation's students that they deserve and that drive our nation forward.

While we appreciate that under fiscal constraints, Appropriators largely prioritized programs essential to students most in need, more must be done. The increases are marginal. Looking ahead to FY18, which starts in just a few months, we urge Congress to reject the even deeper cuts proposed by the new Administration and redouble efforts to address the years-long lag in investments in education created by sequestration and the untenable budget caps. Congress should ensure adequate resources in order to fully and effectively implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and truly focus on closing opportunity and resource gaps so every student has access to a high-quality public education.

We note that the current year's bill at least focuses investments in Title I, IDEA, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (after-school) program, magnet schools, Head Start, Arts and Education, and Impact Aid. Other important increases to TRIO, GEAR Up, and Child Care and Development Block Grants (CCDBG) are important. Further, we applaud the reinstatement of year-round Pell Grant awards which will allow an estimated one million students to receive an additional grant each year.

We are, however, deeply disappointed by the significant cut to Title II under ESSA. This cut will make it more difficult for school districts to ensure class-sizes are small enough for educators to provide more individual attention for students and may limit professional development opportunities for educators.

We are also disappointed by the inclusion of a three-year reauthorization for the Washington D.C. private school voucher program. While we realize bipartisan opposition to vouchers has consistently forced Congress to resort to this maneuver throughout the program's history, it is still perplexing given last week's Education Department study that found that students who entered D.C. private schools as a result of the voucher program perform worse than their peers in public schools.

And while the omnibus continues the Washington, D.C. voucher program, it is unfortunately silent on renewing the now expired Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS), which provides critical funding for over 4,400 schools in 775 rural counties located near national forests. Impacted communities in rural areas across the country already have been facing severe budget shortfalls and loss of educational opportunities for students, and we believe Congress and the Administration should not ignore their plight any longer.

We appreciate your consideration of our views on the final FY17 bill, and encourage Congress to chart a better path forward in FY18 that breaks the cycle of harmful, shortsighted budget caps and provides the investments and opportunities for a quality public education that every student should have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marc Egan  
Director, Government Relations