



March 22, 2018

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the more than three million members of the National Education Association (NEA) and the 50 million students they serve, we urge you to Vote Yes on H.R. 1625, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of FY18. This bill, while not perfect, takes the first step in reinvesting in education funding and prioritizes programs which help students most in need. Votes associated with this issue may be included in NEA's 2018 Legislative Report Card for the 115th Congress.

The FY18 omnibus appropriations bill takes long overdue steps to increase education funding after years of austerity. While this is a welcome development, we hope it is also a trend for the future in order to correct years of funding deficiencies. Most importantly, we are pleased that the increase in education funding prioritizes programs that support students most in need. Notably, Title I, IDEA, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Career and Technical Education, Impact Aid, and Head Start all receive important funding increases in the bill. Further, the Child Care Development Block Grants receive the largest single-year increase in the program's history and the Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants program received a nearly three-fold increase in formula grants, which can be used to support school counselors, school-based mental health services, and other related activities. The bill also rejects Education Secretary Betsy DeVos' request to eliminate important programs, like Title II that provides professional development for educators and reduces class sizes so students have more individualized support.

College affordability programs received a needed boost in the bill. The maximum Pell Grant award is increased by \$175 a year. We are extremely pleased to see the first ever inclusion of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program in discretionary funding. The FY18 bill includes \$350 million in discretionary relief funding and makes an important technical fix to the program, which modifies eligibility for students who were unaware they were enrolled in an ineligible repayment plan but are otherwise eligible for PSLF. This program is crucial because it encourages college graduates to pursue careers in education, firefighting, law enforcement and other forms of public service.

The expired Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program received a long overdue reauthorization in the bill. Importantly, the SRS reauthorization includes two years of funding. The program is a vital lifeline for schools and communities in 775 rural counties in 41 states who are near national lands, which limits their tax base. Funding goes toward education and other essential basic services like infrastructure, fire, and safety.

We are pleased that the bill includes the first steps toward common-sense gun violence prevention, but much more is needed. Included are provisions to strengthen the existing background check system (NICS) and report language finally allowing the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention to conduct gun violence prevention research. While strengthening the background check system is important, it falls short of requiring universal background checks, which has broad public support. These steps cannot be the only ones taken by this Congress to address the epidemic of gun violence. If they are, it will be a failure of leadership to act.

We are also pleased with the inclusion of language from the STOP School Violence Act that prohibits funding for purchasing firearms or firearms training for educators. However, we are strongly disappointed that civil rights protections for due process of students are not included in this bill, and we hope to work with Congress to prevent a return to zero-tolerance policies that disproportionately harm students of color and those with disabilities.

The bill includes important funding increases for the upcoming Census to help ensure that everyone is counted for purposes of fair representation. It also invests in election technology grants to help states secure our election systems.

While we are pleased that the bill rejects the worst of the Trump administration's requests on immigration, such as a concrete wall on our southern border, defunding Sanctuary Cities, and increasing interior deportation agents, we continue to be deeply disappointed that due to the Trump Administration's intransigence, there is no permanent solution included for Dreamers or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients.

Overall, the FY18 omnibus appropriations bill is a step in the right direction, particularly in its focus on investments in education and prioritizing programs that help students most in need. We urge you to vote yes on the bill.

Sincerely,

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

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association