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February 8, 2018

United States House of Representatives  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative/Senator:

On behalf of our three million members and the 50 million students they serve, we would like to express our views on the proposed budget agreement to be voted on this week as part of another continuing resolution. We have long advocated for elimination of the senseless and untenable budget caps, which have resulted in wholly inadequate funding for critical programs like education and health care, and welcome the \$131 billion increase in funding for non-defense discretionary programs over two years.

Raising the caps begins to reverse — but not fully — years of inadequate funding that has left support for non-defense programs at a 40-year low as a percentage of GDP, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. With this agreement, we urge Congress to ensure a substantial increase in the Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill to make room for significantly more funding for Title I, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and other programs that target the students most in need. In this first full year of implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — enacted with broad, bipartisan support — Congress should be helping states and local school districts by providing adequate funding.

We are pleased with additional components to the agreement, including:

- \$4 billion to help make college more affordable, an allotment we encourage Congress to use to bolster the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program
- A full 10-year extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
- \$7 billion for Community Health Centers, and their reauthorization for two years
- Closing the “donut hole” in Medicare Part D coverage for prescription drugs
- \$5.8 billion for the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program

The agreement also provides long-overdue help for millions of citizens and scores of communities still recovering from recent natural disasters, including much-needed educational assistance. However, we would be remiss if we failed to express displeasure about the inclusion of even temporary school vouchers. We believe that Congress should not be spending taxpayer dollars on private and religious schools — which can pick and choose their students based on economic status, academic achievement, or language spoken — and that only fully accredited schools should be eligible to receive funds for displaced students. Moreover, many of the children in the affected areas have witnessed disasters, been uprooted from their homes, and suffered other traumas. They need schools ready and equipped to offer a well-rounded education

as well as support services like counseling, health care, and nutritious meals — all of which public schools do on a daily basis.

The proposed agreement is evidence that Congress is capable of reaching bipartisan compromises for the betterment of the country — when it wants to. And yet, despite overwhelming public support and bipartisan backing in both chambers for a permanent legislative solution to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), no resolution has been reached. A recent [Quinnipiac University](#) poll found that Americans support allowing Dreamers to stay in the United States and become citizens by an almost 8 to 1 margin. Since September, when President Trump declared an end to DACA, the 800,000 Dreamers brought to the United States as children, including 9,000 educators, have been living in fear, not knowing what their future holds. This treatment is cruel and immoral.

In addition, Congress still needs to renew the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) and Community Self Determination Act, which expired in September 2015. The law helped support essential community services in 775 rural counties located near national forests, including public education for over 9 million students. Loss of that support has forced high schools to offer fewer courses, so some students may not fulfill the basic requirements for admittance to their state university systems. Athletic and other enrichment opportunities are vanishing, along with music and art classes. Fewer educators are available to provide reading interventions, work with special needs students, and carry out critical programs. Funds for public safety and emergency response have also dried up, leaving everyone less safe — residents of the affected counties as well as those who visit them.

The proposed budget agreement contains several positive elements and is proof that bipartisanship is still possible. The agreement does not go far enough, however. The glaring omission of a Dreamer fix is discouraging — especially when there is bipartisan support for action in both chambers of Congress and the public at large. Congress should muster the courage to reach an agreement forthwith to provide a permanent legal solution for Dreamers.

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