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Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of our three million members and the 50 million students they serve, we would like to express our views on the FY2019 Labor-HHS-Education bill. As the House and Senate conference begins, we urge members to prioritize education funding increases for critical programs like those targeting the students most in need to help insure that all students have access to a high-quality education. And, given the recent reports that Education Secretary Betsy DeVos is considering spending federal funds to purchase guns and arm educators, we urge you to include language prohibiting such action.

Conferees should include the highest possible allocation for core education programs. After years of austerity, Congress increased education funding in FY2018 — a welcome development we hope will continue. In addition to increasing overall education funding, the FY2019 bill should prioritize programs serving the students most in need, like Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) – like the Senate appropriations bill called for - and after-school and early childhood education programs. Even with the increases in the Senate version, huge funding gaps remain. For the 2017-18 school year, public schools received \$3.7 billion, or 19 percent, less for [Title I](#) students than they did in 2010. The federal share of [IDEA](#) funding for the 2017-18 school year was the lowest since 2001 — just 14.6 percent, far short of the 40 percent Congress promised to provide. Nearly 51 million children attend public schools, the highest number in many years, and one in five live in poverty. We urge Congress to act now to address the persistent lag in education funding particularly for the students who need it most.

In addition, we strongly believe it is imperative that conferees include language to prohibit funds from this bill to be used to purchase firearms, to arm educators or to train educators on the use of firearms. We need fewer guns in schools, not more. Educators' role is to educate their students, not serve as armed security guards. Congress included such a prohibition in the "Stop School Violence Act" portion of the omnibus funding bill earlier this year. However, recent reports indicate that Secretary DeVos is considering using Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants, Title IV-A of the ESSA for that very purpose, instead of its original intent: to empower states to improve student academic achievement by increasing capacity to provide a well-rounded education, promote student health, and ensure access to technology. It is unfortunate that Secretary DeVos has injected confusion into this issue, but because of that we urge conferees to make it clear to all that no funds in this bill should be used to purchase firearms or arm educators.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association