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July 13, 2016

The Honorable Harold Rogers, Chairman

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey, Vice Chairwoman

House Appropriations Committee

Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole, Chairman

The Honorable Rose DeLauro, Ranking Member

House Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative,

On behalf of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, representing more than 13,000 school system leaders across the country, and the Association of School Business Officials International, a 10,000 member educational association that supports school business professionals who are passionate about quality education, we write to relay our thoughts on the FY 2017 Labor-Health Human Services, Education and Other Appropriations bill, which is scheduled for consideration in your committee today, July 13. While we commend the sub-committee for their work to move an LHHS budget, acknowledge the education-related increases in the bill and recognize the budget pressures facing each appropriations sub-committee, we continue to emphasize the importance of eliminating the discretionary funding caps. Adequate investment in education is at the foundation of our nation’s economic viability and the current caps significantly hamper the ability of Congress to invest in education.

Just over seven months ago, President Obama signed the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. FY17 allocations are the funds that will support the first year of ESSA implementation, and the allocations included in the bill you consider today are inconsistent in their support for the law. Congress must follow its strong bipartisan support for authorizing statute with adequate funding levels. In particular, it is critical to ensure a Title I allocation that ensures at least level funding to school districts. The bill retains $450 million in funding from the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program, now eliminated, and runs it through the Title I formula. Even with this infusion of funding, the House proposal results in a shortfall of $200 million in local level allocations, meaning school districts will start their first year under ESSA with a Title I cut.

We applaud the proposed funding level for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (Title IV) and the committee focus on ensuring the program remains formula-drive to the local level. Title IV helps provide well-rounded education opportunities for all students, and the House FY17 allocation level is robust enough to support meaningful formula driven allocations. We also applaud the proposal’s call to increase funding to IDEA state grants, as it represents a step forward in Congress’ effort to meet its commitment to cover 40% of the additional cost of educating students with disabilities.

The success of our nation is shaped by the success of our public schools and the students they serve. We strongly urge Congress to support negotiations to raise the caps on non-defense discretionary funding, even beyond those of the 2015 Bipartisan Budget Act, which increase pressure on subcommittee allocations and continue to tie the hands of appropriators to more adequately invest in education. In addition to the nominal increase and local level cuts in Title I, the caps and subsequent allocations mean that the bill eliminates, cuts or freezes funding for numerous programs. This is a reality that was recognized at the subcommittee mark up, where it was referenced that there were “more than two dozen education programs that saw their funding reduced or completely eliminated in this bill.”

As the FY17 LHHS-Education bill moves forward, we urge you to work to increase the discretionary spending caps, to improve Title I funding to avoid cuts in local level allocations, and to oppose any ideological policy riders.

Thank you for reviewing our concerns with the FY17 LHHS-Education appropriations bill. We look forward to continuing to work with the committee. Please reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

Noelle Ellerson

AASA, The School Superintendents Association

Associate Executive Director, Policy & Advocacy

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