COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION FUNDING

June 8, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Vice Chairwoman
Senate Appropriations Committee
S-128 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
Senate Appropriations Committee
136 Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the Committee for Education Funding (CEF), a coalition of 116 national education associations and institutions spanning early learning to postgraduate education, we write to express our encouragement by the effort that produced the first bi-partisan Labor-HHS budget to come out of the subcommittee in seven years. We are keenly aware of the difficult budget limitations and priorities you both endeavored to balance, and commend your leadership in moving the budget process forward.

While CEF appreciates that some currently authorized programs received modest increases, we are deeply concerned over the $1.2 billion that was taken from the Pell Grant reserve fund and the precedent that it sets. We continue to emphasize the importance of eliminating the discretionary funding caps, as adequate investment in education is essential to our nation's economic viability. While we acknowledge limited additional investments in Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies, IDEA grants, Impact Aid, and Charter School funding, we are concerned such nominal investments will not be enough as all are critical components in helping students attain their full education potential.

Additionally, while the proposed Title I level is $50 million above the combined FY 2016 level for Title I and School Improvement Grants (SIG), it still represents a cut at the local level. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) absorbed SIG into Title I and increased the school improvement set-aside from 4% to 7%. Thus, even with the additional $50 million provided by your committee, $150 million will be cut from school district allocations, resulting in many school districts receiving a smaller initial Title I allocation than they did in FY 2016.

We would also like to express our concern with the $300 million appropriation for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG) under Title IV, Part A of ESSA, which is a funding level well below the $1.65 billion authorization level established in ESSA. This appropriation level only reflects funding for the programs that were funded in FY16 and consolidated into the bill, even though the activities under the new block grant are far broader than those that were funded—including the effective use of technology, safe and healthy school programs, and well-rounded education programs. At this funding level, many schools will be unable to make meaningful investments in the programs that provide children with a safe and enriched learning environment, critical to their success and achievement.

CEF supports the restoration of year-round Pell grants, as well as the funding necessary to increase the maximum Pell grant from $5,815 for the 2016-2017 school year to an estimated $5,935 for the 2017-2018 school year. Despite this increased investment, however, the bill underfunds several higher education programs that are equally as important to the postsecondary success of America's students. In particular, we wish to highlight the TRIO and GEAR UP programs, which provide supportive services to ensure access and success for low-income, first-generation college students; campus-based aid programs, like Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants and Federal Work-Study, which provide additional funds to help students and families bear the cost of college; and funding to support Minority-Serving Institutions, which help shore up the infrastructure and operations of institutions dedicated to educating students of color.

We continue to urge Congress to eliminate the discretionary caps in order to fund our nation's education programs at an adequate level. Educational attainment is strongly tied to both individual success and the growth, vitality, and innovation of our nation's economic strength. We urge Congress to continue to work toward advancing the resources necessary to implement the best possible opportunities for students, their families, and our nation.

Sincerely,

Makese S. Motley   Sheryl Cohen

Makese Motley	Sheryl Cohen
President	Executive Director