



July 14, 2005

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Appropriations Committee
S-128 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran:

On behalf of the more than 1.3 million members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), I write to express our views regarding the (FY) 2006 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill.

The AFT appreciates the strong bipartisan working record that Senators Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) have established to provide the highest possible funding levels for programs under their jurisdiction. Despite the very tight budgetary constraints imposed by the FY 2006 budget resolution, we appreciate the efforts of these senators to support funding for career and technical education and to include funding for both GEAR-UP and TRIO, two important programs that had been targeted for elimination under the president's budget. Our members also are grateful to committee members who worked to eliminate the Pell Grant shortfall to help make higher education more accessible for students.

However, under the current Senate bill, funding levels for key education programs such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Pell Grants are below even the insufficient increases requested in the president's budget request. As a result, we cannot support this bill in its current form. However, we are optimistic that we can work with members of the Senate to find additional resources to more adequately fund this bill when it moves to the Senate floor.

The insufficient resources set forth in the underlying bill are a direct result of the passage of the fiscal year 2006 federal budget resolution because it failed to fund the federal government's commitments to our country's children under NCLB, IDEA, and Pell. This failure is aggravated by the trade-offs that result from this budget policy. Relatively modest increases in funding for Title I programs, which serve the nation's most disadvantaged children, and IDEA, which serves disabled children, are accomplished by eliminating other worthy, proven programs, such as education technology grants and dropout prevention programs. These increases in NCLB and IDEA are also billions of dollars short of Congress's promise to provide school districts with the resources needed to raise student achievement.

No Child Left Behind

No Child Left Behind is the cornerstone of the federal government's commitment to our most disadvantaged students. However, NCLB's goal of

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high academic standards for all students requires a significant federal financial investment if it is to be realized. The Senate bill falls short of the mark because it actually reduces funding by \$750 million below last year's level. The AFT is particularly concerned that the bill includes only \$100 million in additional funds for Title I above fiscal year 2005. The Senate's Title I total is the same amount provided in H.R. 3010, the House-passed version of the FY 2006 Labor-HHS-Education appropriation, and \$500 million below President Bush's request. None of the proposed funding levels in the Senate bill, including Title I, comes close to the \$22.75 billion promised by Congress and the administration under NCLB. This underfunding will have a devastating effect on schools, particularly those that currently educate large numbers of poor and minority students, and whose teachers and administrators are working tirelessly to meet the requirements of NCLB.

The consistent underfunding of Title I has direct, negative consequences in the schools serving our country's most disadvantaged children. An analysis prepared by the Center for Education Policy indicates that as many as two-thirds of the nation's school districts will receive a cut in their Title I grants in the upcoming school year, based in part on the low appropriations level for FY 2005. As a result, some districts may eliminate programs designed to help children reach the goals of NCLB, such as summer school, remedial reading classes, and family resource counselors. This comes on the heels of widespread federal cuts this past school year, where more than half of the nation's school districts suffered reduced Title I funding from FY2004's shortfalls. The AFT supports the targeting of Title I funds to districts serving the highest concentrations of poor children, but Congress can help reverse the disturbing trend of school districts losing money by appropriating a significant amount of new funding in FY 2006.

The bill provides \$2.9 billion for Title II- Teacher Quality grants. This is the same amount provided by H.R. 3010 and the president's budget, and in the FY 2005 Labor-HHS- Education appropriation. While the AFT is pleased that the Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee recommendations do not divert scarce funds from useful professional development programs in Title II to an unproven teacher incentive-pay program, the level funding of these programs means an actual cut in services when one accounts for inflation.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Although the bill provides an additional \$100 million for IDEA over FY 2005, the total amount is \$50 million below the levels in H.R. 3010 and \$400 million below the president's request. Additionally, it is \$4 billion less than what Congress promised when it passed the IDEA 2004 Act just six months ago. This modest increase does not keep pace with increases in student population and continues to fall short of meeting the federal government's commitment to fund its share of special education costs. When the law was originally enacted, Congress promised to help school districts by funding 40 percent of the national average per-pupil

expenditure for every special education student. This year, the federal share of special education funding will decrease from 18.6 percent to 18.1 percent of the total. Because IDEA ensures students with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education, this reduction means that the funds for serving these students will come from other parts of already strained local school district budgets. The federal government has not provided even half of this promised amount, and this bill brings us no closer to that target.

Pell Grants

The Senate bill recommends an additional \$812 million for Pell Grants over funding levels for FY 2005, but maintains the current cap of \$4,050 as the maximum individual grant. This amount is \$210 million less than funding levels in H.R. 3010, meaning that the modest increase of \$100 for the Pell maximum called for in the president's budget will not be realized under either bill. This funding level is insufficient given the fact that college tuition has increased by 36 percent since 2001. Congress must make it a priority to help more low- and middle-income students gain access to higher education.

Similar to the president's budget and H.R. 3010, the Senate bill significantly shortchanges a number of other crucial programs, such as Comprehensive School Reform, Safe and Drug-Free Schools, English Language Acquisition, and 21st Century Schools. Level funding or cutting these programs, given inflationary factors, will result in a reduction of services.

The AFT will continue to fight for federal spending bills that appropriately prioritize the needs of our nation and our children. We urge you to support increases in funding for these crucial education programs when the full Senate considers this bill later this year.

Thank you for considering our views on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Kristor Cowan
Director, Legislation Department

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