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June 9, 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
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
Senate Appropriations Committee
136 Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator,

On behalf of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, representing more than 13,000 school system leaders across the country, I 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, June 9. While we commend the sub-committee for their work to move the first bipartisan LHHS budget in seven years and acknowledge the budget pressures facing each appropriations sub-committee, we remain concerned that the education provisions within the bill, which include nominal increases for a small number of programs, include a \$220 million reduction in discretionary funding for education (compared to FY2016 enacted levels).

Almost exactly six months ago today, 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 fall short of supporting the new 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. While the bill includes a \$50 million increase over the FY16 Title I and School Improvement Grant allocations, it still results in a shortfall of \$150 million in local level allocations, meaning school districts will start their first year under ESSA with a Title I cut. We are also deeply concerned with the low allocation to the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (Title IV). Title IV helps provide well-rounded education opportunities for all students, and we believe the program should receive a higher allocation, at a level robust enough to support meaningful formula driven allocations.

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 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) receives a \$40 million increase, which leaves the federal share hovering around 16% (less than half of the authorized 40% of the additional cost associated with educating student with special needs) and below FY10 allocations when adjusted for inflation.

As the FY17 LHHS-Education bill moves forward, we urge you to improve Title I funding to avoid cuts in local level allocations, to increase Title IV allocations to a level that supports meaningful formula allocation, 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 M. Ellerson
Associate Executive Director, Policy & Advocacy