

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The undersigned organizations—representing the full range of stakeholders supporting the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education and related agencies—urge you to allocate as high a funding level as possible to these programs and services in the fiscal year (FY) 2017 302(b) subcommittee allocations. The activities administered by these departments and agencies serve a broad range of constituencies and needs, but they all share a common, fundamental goal of strengthening this nation by improving Americans’ lives.

Despite their profound impact on health and well-being, child development, educational and skills attainment, and productivity, programs and services of the “Labor-HHS” spending bill continue to be short-changed in the annual appropriations process. For example, with the much-needed sequestration relief provided through the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016 provided nondefense discretionary programs with a 6.9 percent increase overall, but programs in the Labor-HHS bill only received a 3.3 percent increase over 2015 levels. As a result, funding for Americans’ health, education, workforce, and social services programs—representing more than half of all nondefense discretionary spending—rose less than half as much as the nondefense average. At the same time, the Labor-HHS allocation remains about 10 percent below FY 2010 levels, adjusted for inflation.

Continuing to underfund these programs and agencies is irresponsible and unsustainable. The effects of short changing the Labor-HHS allocation are:

- Slowing scientific discovery in basic, biomedical, and health services research that prevents disease, improves health, and curbs medical costs.
- Eroding the public health infrastructure and workforce, limiting our ability to respond to public health crises and monitor health trends for new and emerging threats.
- Hindering efforts to close troubling achievement gaps, raise overall student achievement, and increase high school graduation, college access and completion rates.
- Leaving far too many low-income children without access to high quality preschool and other early learning opportunities.
- Hindering efforts of our local employers to fill the approximately five million jobs in the U.S. because too many workers lack the necessary postsecondary education and credentials to fill these positions.
- Preventing almost one million citizens from accessing the critical workforce and job training services that Congress overwhelmingly authorized last year.

- Ignoring the needs of individuals who find themselves without a high school credential and who need a pathway back to education, employment and active citizenship.

Without an increase in the Labor-HHS 302(b) allocation, it will be virtually impossible to meaningfully expand investments in important initiatives—such as medical research at the National Institutes of Health, implementing the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act, continuing to improve college affordability and completion, or achieving the goals contained in the bipartisan Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA)—without deep cuts in other equally important initiatives.

We urge lawmakers to commit to improving the lives of Americans by increasing the Labor-HHS appropriations allocation in FY 2017.

If you have questions about this letter, please contact:

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Joel Packer, Committee for Education Funding (202-383-0083 or JPacker@cef.org); or
Bridget Brown, Campaign to Invest in America's Workforce (202-589-1790 or bridget@nawdp.org).

Sincerely,

Cc: Members, House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittees