

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 17, 2016

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
BUDGET
ENERGY AND
NATURAL RESOURCES
INTELLIGENCE
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski,

As you work with your colleagues in the House of Representatives to make additional spending decisions related to Fiscal Year 2017, I urge you to prioritize a few key items in the jurisdiction of the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS) Subcommittee. The items I highlight below would have a tremendous impact in Maine and deserve your full consideration.

- Full Funding for the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. As the nation's opioid epidemic continues to worsen, it is imperative that we fund authorized HHS provisions in the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA). While I am encouraged that the Senate Appropriations Committee's Labor-HHS FY17 bill provides \$261 million to combat opioid abuse, an increase of 93 percent from FY16, funding for CARA will further bolster our response by expanding access to treatment, recovery services and education programs, overdose reversal medication, as well as strengthening or establishing new prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs). I believe that the provisions authorized in CARA addressing these issues can make a significant impact. Therefore, I urge you and your colleagues to fund the HHS components in CARA so that we can make progress in addressing this public health crisis.

In addition to providing funding to fight the opioid epidemic, I ask that you give attention to four additional priorities that were either underfunded or unfunded in the Labor-HHS Subcommittee bill that passed the Senate Appropriations Committee earlier this year. These priorities are:

- Full Funding for Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants. Title IV-A of the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) authorized the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG) program, which consolidates more than 20 existing education programs into a single, formula-funded block grant. The intention of this grant is to support school districts in a range of critical programs and services that enrich student learning and success, including providing students with access to education technology as well as professional development opportunities for educators using technology in the classroom.

In recognition of the broad range of supports funded by the SSAEG program, ESSA authorized SSAEG at \$1.65 billion for FY17. Unfortunately, the Committee-approved Labor-HHS bill funds the program at just \$300 million, dramatically less than what was authorized. If this low funding level is carried over into a final FY17 funding bill, states and school districts will find it extremely challenging to implement high-quality programming that promotes the range of opportunities SSAEG is intended to support. Underfunding this program in its first year would set a troubling precedent and run counter to the intent of the program's authorizers, who intended a robust funding level that would enable a meaningful distribution of funds across our nation's school districts.

Small districts like those in Maine would be particularly impacted by insufficient SSAEG distributions. The House Appropriations Committee approved FY17 SSAEG funding at \$1 billion – much closer to the recommendation in ESSA. I strongly urge you and your colleagues to increase the SSAEG allocation to ensure that implementation of the new education law is a success.

- Continued Funding for the Assets for Independence Program. The Assets for Independence (AFI) program, which funds and supports Individual Development Accounts nationwide, is a critical program that helps low-income workers save money and build assets for the future. Unfortunately, your committee moved to defund the AFI program in its FY17 Labor-HHS bill. The AFI program has made a real difference in my home state of Maine and provides tens of thousands of families across the country with the support and financial education to help them leave poverty behind for good, and I continue to believe that a modest ongoing federal investment in the program will reap significant rewards. To that end, I strongly urge you and your colleagues to reinstate funding for AFI in any longer-term FY17 funding bill.
- Continued Funding for the Medicare State Health Insurance Assistance Program. SHIP-funded programs provide one-on-one assistance to millions of Medicare beneficiaries across the country. Due to the complex nature of signing up for Medicare, the support provided by SHIP is vital to ensuring these beneficiaries receive coverage that fits their needs. These personalized services surpass what is offered by other programs, such as 1-800-MEDICARE and Medicare.gov, particularly for beneficiaries who live in rural areas or have complex chronic care needs. I was disappointed to see that your committee proposed eliminating funding for this program altogether. As the House Appropriations Committee approved level funding for SHIP at \$52.1 million, I strongly encourage you and your colleagues to consider doing the same.
- Increased Funding for Federal TRIO Programs. As our country looks for ways to increase economic growth amidst a slow recovery from the Great Recession, it is important that we increase the number of disadvantaged students entering higher education. The TRIO programs are key to these efforts and are aimed at ending generational cycles of poverty by enabling low-income and first-generation college students to succeed in postsecondary education, putting them on a path to a prosperous future. Over 6,000 Maine students benefit

from the TRIO programs each year. I visit with groups of them annually, and I am consistently inspired by their compelling stories and impressive success. I am pleased to see that your committee approved level funding of \$900 million to support federal TRIO programs in FY17. Given that the House Appropriations Committee approved an increase in TRIO funding, to \$960 million, I respectfully request that you consider additional investments to broaden the reach of TRIO programs to students across the country.

I understand that many challenging questions face you and your colleagues as additional spending decisions are made regarding the remainder of Fiscal Year 2017. If you have any questions about the contents of this letter, please have your staff reach out to Marge Kilkelly at marge_kilkelly@king.senate.gov or Aisha Woodward at aisha_woodward@king.senate.gov. I appreciate your consideration of these requests and look forward to working together in the coming weeks and months to continue our support for these vital programs and services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Angus King" with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator