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December 18, 2019

U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the NEA, who teach and support 50 million students across the nation, we urge you to vote YES on the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 and we applaud the bipartisan leadership displayed in reaching a compromise agreement. Votes associated with these issues may be included in NEA's Report Card for the 116th Congress.

Among the notable provisions in the bill are:

- **Important increased investments in education:** We strongly support the increases to Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the landmark federal programs serving students most in need. We applaud the boost to full-service community schools, which provide students with the academic and support services that cultivate success. Appropriators were right to reject Secretary DeVos' proposed elimination of Title II, which provides professional development for educators and reduces class sizes, and of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (or after-school programs). Both programs see greater investments in this bill, as do the English Language Learners program, Pell Grants, higher education programs, and the Office of Civil Rights.
- **Extension of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) and Community Self-Determination Act:** This two-year extension will provide schools in 770 rural counties near national forests with funding meant to offset declining federal timber sales. The program had expired at the end of 2018, threatening rural areas with funding cuts for public schools and other essential public services.
- **Repeal of the Excise tax:** We have long sought the permanent repeal of the excise tax on the portion of the cost of employer-sponsored health plans above specified thresholds—\$11,200 for individuals and \$30,150 for families. Educators have for years accepted lower wages in return for decent health care coverage, and would be among those hardest hit by the tax, according to an analysis in [Health Affairs](#).
- **Funding for research on gun violence:** We applaud the long overdue inclusion of funding to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health for research on gun violence as a public health issue, in recognition of the continued threat to our schools and communities.
- **Funding for the 2020 Census:** The Census is vital in determining how federal funding is allocated for education and for many other public services, and we are pleased to see \$7.6 billion dedicated to the Bureau of the Census.

While we are pleased with this bill because of its investments in education and other important areas, we are disappointed that it includes a four-year extension of the District of Columbia private school voucher program, which has been proven ineffective and is unaccountable to taxpayers. However, we are pleased that funding for this program will not be increased.

Again, we urge you to vote yes on this bill, and thank the bipartisan leadership that brought it together.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association