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The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
House Democratic Caucus Chairman  
U.S. House of Representatives  
B245 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Congressman Jeffries:

Thank you for inviting me to participate in the April 30 Democratic Caucus briefing along with my colleagues from AFSCME, AFT, and SEIU. I was honored to represent NEA's 3 million members, who are rising to new challenges during this time and often risking their own health to maintain contact with and support students and communities. Having the opportunity to share our priorities for future pandemic-related legislation with caucus members was a privilege.

COVID-19 has exposed the glaring disparities that deny many students—especially those in minority, low-income, and rural communities—the educational opportunities that *all* students deserve. Our hope is that we do not return to “business as usual” when the pandemic ends, but instead view this moment as a new beginning.

To reiterate, these are our priorities:

- **At least \$175 billion more for the Education Stabilization Fund.** States and local governments are projected to suffer their worst budget shortfalls in history in fiscal year 2021, and deep hits beyond that year as well, due to COVID-19-related costs and a steep drop in tax revenues. Without this additional appropriation for the ESF, essential public services will face cuts that will surpass those during the Great Recession, and students will not have access to the resources or individual support they need. School finance experts predict hundreds of thousands of education jobs lost, further exacerbating the deep hole schools found themselves in a decade ago.
- **Emergency funding to close the homework gap and digital divide, including support for Rep. Grace Meng's Emergency Educational Connections Act (H.R. 6563), to provide at least \$2 billion for an emergency fund, administered through the E-Rate program, for distance and remote learning.** Up to 12 million students, roughly 1 in 5, cannot do schoolwork at home because they lack internet access. A disproportionate share of these students are African American or Hispanic, live in low-income households, or live in rural areas. Now that schools, libraries, and other public facilities are closed, these students have no Wi-Fi access at all; they cannot participate in distance learning and may fall behind their peers. A similar Senate bill urges \$4 billion for this urgent need.

- **\$56 million in additional PPE funding for education support professionals and educators in direct contact with students.** These professionals are continuing to prepare and distribute meals; clean, maintain, and secure school buildings; oversee technology needs; and perform other vital work during the pandemic. They should be considered frontline workers whose jobs are essential, and that means having the PPE to protect themselves, as well as their families and communities, from infection.
- **Cancellation of student loan payments throughout the COVID-19 crisis followed by at least \$30,000 in student loan forgiveness per student after the emergency ends.** Our student loan crisis has held back the economy and crushed millions of American families, leading to defaults, loan balances that never shrink, homes that cannot be purchased, and delays in starting new businesses. The pandemic will worsen this crisis, which is already especially burdensome for African American and Hispanic borrowers. Canceling at least \$30,000 in student loan debt will help us regain our economic footing and position our nation for growth.
- **At least \$4 billion to help states prepare for the 2020 elections.** The pandemic must not be a barrier to voting. To that end, we must ensure safe and accessible methods for all eligible voters to cast a vote by expanding early in-person voting, vote-by-mail options and protections, and safe and viable in-person options. We must also fund voter education to inform voters of new practices. Without these steps, many voters, particularly those in marginalized communities, will not have a say in our democracy.

Our nation will be forced to reckon with the fallout from COVID-19 for years to come, but I believe that by taking the steps outlined above, we can truly emerge from this crisis stronger.

Sincerely,

Lily Eskelsen García  
President

cc: Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi  
Majority Leader Steny Hoyer  
Majority Whip James Clyburn  
Assistant Speaker Ben Ray Luján  
Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey  
Education & Labor Committee Chairman Robert Scott  
Labor and HHHS Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro