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March 5, 2021

U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of our 3 million members and the 50 million students they serve, we urge you to VOTE YES on the American Rescue Plan Act (H.R. 1319). We are especially pleased by the provisions specified below, and urge you to retain them. Votes on this issue may be included in NEA's Report Card for the 117th Congress.

#### **EDUCATION**

- Nearly \$170 billion in dedicated public education funding to:
  - Advance the process of returning safely to in-person instruction—for example, by modifying public K-12 school buildings, purchasing sanitation supplies, training staff to minimize the spread of COVID-19, furnishing personal protective equipment (PPE), taking steps to improve indoor air quality, and intensifying support and instruction for students traumatized by the pandemic and the loss of opportunities to learn; and
  - At the higher education level, providing institutional and student support to address the health, safety, and financial challenges created by COVID-19 and closing the loophole in the 90/10 rule to prevent for-profit colleges from preying on veterans.
- \$7 billion in emergency funding for the Federal Communications Commission's E-Rate program to address the "homework gap" and lost opportunities to learn by equipping students and educators with internet access and devices for remote teaching and learning
- \$350 billion in state and local aid to help avoid further layoffs of educators and other essential public servants
- \$39 billion for early education programs, including the Child Care and Development Block Grant and the child care stabilization fund for providers

#### **HEALTH CARE**

- Increased funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to test, track, and vaccinate people
- Increased Affordable Care Act premium subsidies so people don't have to pay more than 8.5 percent of their income for coverage
- Increased support for Medicaid, community health centers, and tribal health programs
- Increased support for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) programs and training for mental and behavioral health professionals, paraprofessionals, and public safety officers
- Helping people who lose their jobs keep their health insurance by paying 100 percent of COBRA premiums through September

#### **WORKERS & FAMILIES**

- \$1,400 payments to eligible individuals earning under \$75,000 a year

- Increasing supplemental unemployment benefits from \$300 to \$400 per week, though we believe these benefits should be extended to October
- Making the Child Tax Credit fully refundable; increasing the maximum from \$2,000 to \$3,000 per child, with an additional \$600 for each child under age 6; and including families with mixed immigration status
- Strengthening the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program and extending the 15 percent increase in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits through September to ensure children do not go hungry
- Extending tax credits that encourage employers to keep employees and provide paid sick leave
- Including the Butch Lewis Emergency Pension Plan Relief Act to stabilize the pensions of more than 1 million beneficiaries of struggling multiemployer plans
- Establishing an emergency leave fund for federal employees

We also urge you to oppose efforts or amendments to weaken the bill by:

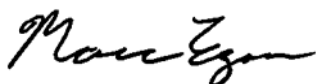
- Cutting funding or support for health care or retirement security, including incorporating in the legislation the TRUST Act (S. 4323), a back-door mechanism for across-the-board cuts to essential programs like Social Security and Medicare
- Denying economic relief to millions of U.S. citizens and lawfully present children who are part of families with mixed immigration status
- Cutting funding for public schools, campuses or state, local, and tribal governments, or tying receipt of funds to potentially unsafe conditions that do not follow health guidance
- Redirecting public dollars to private schools via vouchers, tax credits, education savings accounts, 529 plans, or similar schemes
- Including budget caps or fiscal restrictions that limit the ability to invest in the nation's priorities going forward
- Weakening workers' rights or federal food assistance programs

While applauding that this bill provides much needed and greater resources for public schools and campuses than the previous Congress did, we would be remiss if we did not convey our strong disappointment in the Senate's inclusion of a Betsy DeVos-era \$2.75 billion for private schools—despite multiple avenues and funding previously made available to private schools.

We are deeply disappointed that the Senate version of the American Rescue Plan Act will not include raising the federal minimum wage and strongly support separate legislation to achieve that goal. It has been more than a decade since the last increase in the federal minimum wage—from \$6.55 to \$7.25 per hour. A further increase is long overdue, especially for education support professionals. At the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour, a parent who works full-time (40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year) earns about \$15,000 a year, well below the official poverty level in 2020: \$26,200 a year for a family of four.

As you move toward final passage of the American Rescue Plan, please keep in mind that workers are continuing to lose jobs, children are continuing to go hungry, and public services are continuing to be stretched beyond capacity. There is no time to waste. Please VOTE YES on this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan  
 Director of Government Relations  
 National Education Association