



December 11, 2025

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chair  
House Appropriations Committee  
H-307, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Committee  
H-307, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Chair  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Vice Chair  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Cole, Chair Collins, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Vice Chair Murray,

As Congress continues the fiscal year 2026 (FY26) appropriations process, we write to highlight America Forward's recommendations to inform bicameral, bipartisan negotiations moving forward. These recommendations emphasize the programs and policies to which the House and Senate Appropriation Committees have proposed distinct approaches to date.

America Forward leads the America Forward Coalition, a network of 100+ of the nation's most impactful and innovative non-governmental organizations that develop and advocate for more effective public policies, on issues ranging from early learning to workforce development, to advance opportunity for all. America Forward Coalition members achieve high impact, measurable outcomes in more than 15,000 communities nationwide, touching the lives of over 9 million Americans each year, and driving progress in early child care and learning, K-12 and post-secondary education, youth mental health and wellbeing, economic mobility and workforce development, evidence-based policy, social innovation, national service, and civic participation.

As you work to reconcile differences between House and Senate proposals, we urge you to adopt the following recommendations.

**Education.** We strongly support maintaining funding for our education system in light of the alarming decline in achievement levels. Now is the time to deepen investment in proven approaches alongside the development of cutting-edge strategies, particularly for students in under-resourced communities. We recommend that Congress:

- **Maintain Title I Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) appropriations at or above level funding.**
- **Continue to support the following critical national programs:** 21st Century Community Learning Centers; Preschool Development Grant Birth-5; Education Innovation and Research (EIR); English Language Acquisition; Full-Service Community Schools; Statewide Family

Engagement Centers; Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED); Teacher and School Leader Incentive Grants; and Teacher Quality Partnership Grants. Similarly, we recommend continuing to support, and taking opportunities to further strengthen, the Comprehensive Center and Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) programs.

- **Ensure continued funding for the Postsecondary Student Success Grants (PSSG)** under the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), aligned with the program's strong, historic bipartisan support. As America Forward's research has illustrated, evidence funds like PSSG and the K-12 companion Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program have provided outsized returns and offer a vital path to scale the most effective approaches.<sup>1</sup> We also urge you to ensure that the Department of Education ensures that nonprofit organizations are directly eligible for PSSG and that the program emphasizes the importance of post-college career outcomes alongside completion.<sup>2</sup>
- **Funds the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) and Federal Work Study programs** to provide both invaluable support for postsecondary student success and career opportunities and critical capacity for evidence-focused non-profit organizations (e.g., college students delivering high-impact tutoring).

**Workforce Development.** America Forward calls for policymakers to prioritize investments that improve economic mobility for people across our nation and recommends that Congress:

- **Maintain funding for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Adult, Dislocated, and Youth formula funding streams, as well as WIOA Title II Adult Education.** America Forward strongly supports foundational reform to our nation's workforce system to invest in higher-impact approaches as Congress nearly passed in last year's bipartisan, bicameral A Stronger Workforce for America Act. However, we are concerned that cutting funding for formula programs will weaken a long underfunded workforce system at a time when increased, more effective investment has never been more essential and funding cuts will lead to fewer individuals served and less impactful services for employers who depend on the system for talent.
- **Continue to support the Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) program.** This program has emphasized evidence-based, outcomes-focused approaches. For example, REO has served as a vital funding source for employment social enterprises: businesses that offer jobs, training, and support to people who are getting back on their feet after experiences like incarceration.<sup>3</sup> We note that the Trump Administration's America's Talent Strategy emphasizes the importance of this

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<sup>1</sup> See Sackett, Covell, and Lopez (2023), *Unlocking Innovation: Advancing the Continuous Improvement of Federal Evidence Funds*, America Forward, <https://www.americaforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/America-Forward-Unlocking-Innovation-in-Evidence-Funds-October-2023.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the Appropriations Committees' past explicit directive and elevation of non-profit models, the Department has excluded non-profits as lead applicants for PSSG in past years. See, e.g., page 292-293, House Report 117-403, "Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2023, Report of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives," <https://www.congress.gov/117/crpt/hrpt403/CRPT-117hrpt403.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See more at America Forward (2025), "Workforce Innovation in Action: Three Key Lessons Policymakers Can Learn from Employment Social Enterprises," <https://americaforward.medium.com/workforce-innovation-in-action-three-key-lessons-policymakers-can-learn-from-employment-social-862a46882b8f>.

approach (“The Departments will also support workforce strategies that strengthen transitions into employment for populations such as veterans and individuals who were formerly incarcerated.”)<sup>4</sup>

- **Invest in a new Workforce Development Innovation Fund.** Our workforce development system directs remarkably little funding either to support the most effective programs, or to develop groundbreaking approaches to serve emerging labor market needs. Accordingly, we call on Congress to leverage the National Dislocated Worker Grants to support investment in a Workforce Development Innovation Fund to support targeted development, evaluation, and scale-up of evidence-based workforce strategies along the lines of the Better Jobs Act in the 118th Congress.<sup>5</sup> This approach closely aligns with the America’s Talent Strategy’s emphasis on “DARPA-style experimentation models to test bold new ideas, evaluate real results, scale proven strategies, and prioritize AI literacy and skill development across the workforce system.”<sup>6</sup>
- **Encourage the use of pay-for-success apprenticeship approaches.** We encourage Congress to support a pay-for-success apprenticeships pilot, building on the bipartisan spring 2024 appropriations requirement that the Department of Labor assess and report on the feasibility of a pay-for-success initiative to increase and expand registered apprenticeship programs<sup>7</sup> as well as the America’s Talent Strategy’s embrace of this approach.<sup>8</sup>

**AmeriCorps.** Many America Forward Coalition members have leveraged AmeriCorps funding as an invaluable means to expand their capacity to develop and implement evidence-based strategies ranging from high-impact tutoring to college and career advising. **We urge you to maintain level funding for AmeriCorps programs, including State and National Grants and VISTA.**

**Homelessness Funding.** We urge you to include **language directing HUD to renew all Continuum of Care (CoC) grants expiring in 2026 for an additional 12-month period** in order to afford communities the stability needed to adapt to funding shifts while allowing Congress time to work with the Administration to amend authorizing language. We are deeply concerned by the prospect of abrupt shifts that disrupt proven, evidence-based approaches and put 170,000 households, many with disabilities, at risk of losing housing and services that support mental health, recovery, and long-term stability.

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health.** We encourage you to **provide at least level funding for substance abuse and mental health programs under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).** These programs are of vital importance, ranging from school-based programs, to independent programs for college students, to young adult services, to family supports.

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<sup>4</sup> See page 15, U.S. Departments of Labor, Commerce, and Education (2025), *America’s Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age*, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OPA/newsreleases/2025/08/Americas-Talent-Strategy-Building-the-Workforce-for-the-Golden-Age.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> S. 4008 (118th Congress), available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/4008/text>.

<sup>6</sup> See America’s Talent Strategy at page 10.

<sup>7</sup> Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2024, Explanatory Statement, <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20240318/Division D LHHS.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> See page 12 of America’s Talent Strategy: “Pay-for-performance models will be used to provide predictable financial support for employers, while outcomes based grants to states will reward efforts that grow apprenticeship participation and reduce barriers to expansion.”

**Program Implementation.** We support appropriations language that **ensures the timely announcement and awarding of funding opportunities**. In addition, while we broadly support efforts to improve the efficiency and impact of the U.S. Department of Education, we are deeply concerned by implementation challenges under the initial Education-Labor interagency agreement and the prospect of further disruption under the newly-announced agreements, such as impacts on programs that serve students with intellectual disabilities and learning differences and potential burden on states, districts, and their community partners navigating changing grants processes and multiple federal points of contact. **We therefore support appropriations language that pauses the present agreements in lieu of explicit Congressional action to restructure the agency.**

### **Conclusion**

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input at this critical time, and would welcome a conversation with your staff to discuss our priorities.

Thank you,

Chase Sackett  
Policy Director  
America Forward

CC: Speaker Mike Johnson; Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries; Senate Majority Leader John Thune; Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer; House Committee on Appropriations, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Chair Robert Aderholt; Senate Committee on Appropriations, Labor Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee Chair Shelley Moore Capito; Senate Committee on Appropriations, Labor Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee Ranking Member Tammy Baldwin.