



March 31, 2026

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 begins the fiscal year 2027 (FY27) appropriations process, we write to share America Forward's recommendations to advance programs and approaches that foster innovation, reward results, and catalyze cross-sector partnerships to expand opportunity for all. Our recommendations address programs relevant to the Agriculture, CJS, LHHS, and THUD subcommittees.

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.

We have included a full table of our Coalition recommendations for program funding levels below. In addition, we highlight several concepts for your consideration, with an emphasis on approaches with strong bipartisan support:

Expand apprenticeships with a pay-for-performance model. Apprenticeships offer a compelling model to bridge education and workforce transitions, and they provide a powerful tool for upskilling and reskilling the workforce. As America Forward and our partners at Apprenticeships for America [outlined in a recent report](#), embracing pay-for-performance approaches can provide

an innovative, efficient way to expand apprenticeships participation and enhance quality. We encourage Congress to build on its past strong bipartisan support for a pay-for-performance approach to apprenticeships, including a 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. This effort would also build on DOL's transformational recent investment in pay-for-performance apprenticeships approaches.

Invest in an Advanced Workforce Development Innovation Demonstration Project. Our workforce development system directs 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 invest in an Advanced Workforce Development Innovation Demonstration Project to accomplish two goals:

- (1) invest in a tiered evidence framework to accelerate practitioner-led development, rigorous evaluation, and scaling of evidence-based workforce strategies, programs, and tools that improve workers' long-term economic outcomes, along the lines of the longstanding Education and Research program; and
- (2) support the creation and implementation of complementary infrastructure to accelerate research and development in the workforce field to expedite and evaluate projects under the Fund and otherwise, such as a secure data enclave or platform.

This investment would align closely with bipartisan proposals in Congress and advance 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."¹

Empower performance-based contracting in workforce. We recommend that Congress direct the Department of Labor to revise its guidance on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) pay-for-performance contracting to ensure boards and providers can leverage it, building on the Department's recent invitation to request a waiver on pay-for-performance caps. Gaps in guidance have chilled the adoption of pay-for-performance contract approaches to date, following WIOA's reauthorization in 2014 despite widespread interest. In particular, Congress should direct the DOL to clarify provisions regarding fund management, performance indicators, and documentation requirements.

Rebuild the Institute of Education Sciences. America Forward urges Congress to build on language in the 2026 appropriations bill and direct the Department of Education to prioritize rebuilding the Institute of Education Sciences, including restoring IES's staffing to a sufficient

¹ See p. 10, U.S. Departments of Labor, Commerce, and Education (2025), *America's Talent Strategy*, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OPA/newsreleases/2025/08/Americas-Talent-Strategy-Building-the-Workforce-for-the-Golden-Age.pdf>.

level to operate effectively and efficiently. We appreciate many of the recommendations in Dr. Amber Northern’s recent *Reimagining the Institute of Education Sciences* report, including an emphasis on addressing top-priority research questions and shifting to a more nimble, practitioner-focused approach.² IES’s research should, for example, prioritize such timely issues as the impact of AI-related strategies and digital media on educational outcomes; ways to scale high-impact tutoring models; the design and implementation of evidence-based literacy initiatives; the development and expansion of instructional leadership and high-quality coaching for educators; effective family and community engagement strategies and student support models; the expansion of high-quality after-school, summer, and extended learning programs; and postsecondary success strategies that facilitate timely completion and career success. However, without sufficient capacity, IES will be unable to implement these and other reforms.

Advance innovative K-12 assessments. Responding to deep demand from states for support for assessment innovation, we recommend increasing funding to the Competitive Grants for State Assessments (CGSA) program under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as a priority for FY2027. We also recommend that Congress include report language requiring the Department of Education to support assessments that incorporate key measures such as higher-order thinking skills and learning dispositions, building on efforts in twenty states to establish profiles of a graduate that address both academic and durable skills.

Ensure nonprofit providers are directly eligible for Postsecondary Student Success Grants (PSSG). We encourage Congress to clarify that non-profits should be eligible as lead grantees for the PSSG program, in contrast with the Department of Education’s past practice that required them to formally partner with an institutional lead.³ Historically, non-profits have been heavily represented as lead grantees in the companion Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program because they are ideally-positioned to scale evidence-based strategies nationally. The Department’s past practice in PSSG has effectively excluded many strong student success programs that support high school and returning students in selecting high-ROI institutions before enrolling (i.e., before the non-profit could identify the proper institutional partners for a PSSG grant) and then support their continued success during and post-college.

Elevate SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T). As states and communities around the nation implement new work requirements under SNAP as well as Medicaid, we urge Congress to take advantage of opportunities to leverage the underutilized but powerful SNAP E&T program. Expanding support for high-quality technical assistance under the National Partnerships Grants

² Northern and Opp (2026), *Reimagining the Institute of Education Sciences: A Strategy for Relevance and Renewal*, <https://ies.ed.gov/ies/2026/02/reimagining-ies>.

³ 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>.

will enable more high-impact providers to participate in the logistically complex SNAP E&T program, while investment in SNAP E&T data systems will facilitate stronger performance management, evaluation, and efficiency across the program.

Support reliable, evidence-based mental health, substance use disorder, and housing funding.

We appreciate Congress's continued support for the timely disbursement of key programs related to mental health and substance use disorders, as well as efforts to avoid disruption in the system through abrupt changes to the Continuum of Care program. Moving forward, we support efforts both to invest in innovation as well as to prioritize outcomes-based, evidence-driven strategies across mental health, substance use disorder, and housing programs that make meaningful impacts for affected youth, families, and workers. We also support design elements that recognize the interrelated nature of these issues and funding streams.

Program implementation. Building on the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2026, we support continued appropriations language that ensures the timely announcement and awarding of funding opportunities. In addition, we support efforts to improve the efficiency and impact of the U.S. Department of Education and ensure dependable disbursement of funds; as such, we believe that efforts to restructure the Department should be conducted in collaboration with Congress and support appropriations language to that effect.

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: 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; House Committee on Appropriations, Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Chair Andy Harris; Senate Committee on Appropriations, Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Chair John Hoeven; House Committee on Appropriations,

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Chair Steve Womack; Senate Committee on Appropriations, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Chair Cindy Hyde-Smith; House Committee on Appropriations, Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Chair Hal Rogers; Senate Committee on Appropriations, Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Chair Jerry Moran

Program	FY27 America Forward Request
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS)	
<i>U.S. Department of Education: Early Learning, Elementary and Secondary Programs</i>	
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title I-A Formula Funds	\$19.4 billion
ESEA Title I-B Competitive Grants for State Assessments (CGSA) Program	\$90 million
ESEA Title II-A	\$3 billion
ESEA Title III	\$2 billion
ESEA Title IV (Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants)	\$1.6 billion
IDEA (Part B, Section 619, Part C, and Part D)	Part B: \$14.4 billion Section 619 (Preschool): \$683 million Part C: \$974 million Part D (National Activities): \$300 million
21st Century Community Learning Centers	\$2.1 billion
American History and Civics Education National Activities Grant Program	\$150 million
Charter Schools Program	\$500 million
Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grants	\$200 million
Education Innovation and Research (EIR)	\$284 million
Full Service Community Schools	\$250 million
McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children	\$200 million
School-Based Mental Health Services Grants	\$200 million
School Safety National Activities Program	\$250 million
SEED Grant Program	\$100 million
Teacher and School Leader Incentive Grants	\$100 million
<i>U.S. Department of Education: Career, Technical, and Adult Education</i>	
Career and Technical Education: Basic State Grants and National Programs	\$2 billion
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act)	\$1 billion
<i>U.S. Department of Education: Higher Education</i>	

Pell Grant Maximum Award	\$7,395
Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program	\$150 million
Federal Work Study	\$1.6 billion
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG)	\$1.15 billion
Federal TRIO Programs	\$1.298 billion
GEAR UP	\$400 million
Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)	\$250 million
Postsecondary Student Success Grants	\$55 million
Teacher Quality Partnership Grants	\$100 million
<i>U.S. Department of Education: Institute of Education Sciences</i>	
Institute of Education Sciences - Total Funding	\$900 million
Accelerate, Transform, and Scale (ATS) Initiative	\$60 million
Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program	\$60 million
<i>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)</i>	
Children's Mental Health Services	\$225 million
Community Mental Health Services Block Grant	\$1.5 billion
Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention - Campus Grant	\$12 million
Mental Health Crisis Response Grants	\$30 million
State Opioid Response Grants	\$2 billion
Substance Use Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Support Services Block Grant	\$2.5 billion
<i>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children and Families (ACF)</i>	
Child Care and Development Block Grants	\$12.4 billion
Head Start and Early Head Start	\$14.27billion
Preschool Development Grants	\$500 million
<i>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Office of Population Affairs</i>	
Project AWARE	\$244 million
Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program	\$150 million
<i>U.S. Department of Labor</i>	
WIOA Title I Adult & Dislocated Grants	\$2.5 billion
WIOA Title I Youth Grants	\$1.25 billion
Advanced Workforce Development Innovation Fund	\$50 million
Apprenticeship Grants	\$570 million

Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO)	\$200 million
Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI)	\$12 million
YouthBuild	\$130 million
<i>AmeriCorps</i>	
Corporation for National and Community Service - Total Funding	\$1.291 billion
<u>Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD)</u>	
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development	
Continuum of Care	\$5 billion
Section 4 Capacity Building and Affordable Housing Program	\$50 million
<u>Agriculture</u>	
U.S. Department of Agriculture	
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) National Partnership Grants	\$15 million
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) Data and Technical Assistance (DATA) Grants	\$15 million
<u>Commerce, Justice, and Science</u>	
Department of Justice - Office of Justice Programs	
Second Chance Act Programs	\$150 million
Second Chance Act Pay for Success Projects	\$10 million