

**Chairman Roy Blunt Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies**

Hearing to Review the FY2019 Budget Request for the Department of Education

June 5, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. Thank you, Secretary DeVos, for appearing before the Subcommittee today to discuss the Department of Education's FY2019 budget request.

The FY2019 budget request for the Department of Education is \$63.2 billion, \$7.7 billion, or 11 percent, less than the FY2018 Omnibus passed in March.

Like last year's request, this budget proposal includes significant changes to the scope of the federal government's investments in education. It eliminates or consolidates over 30 programs and significantly reduces funding for several others. It also includes \$1 billion for a new competitive grant program for states and school districts to expand school choice programs.

I appreciate the fresh perspective you bring to the Department. This request makes difficult decisions and prioritizes funding for programs while working under tight budget constraints. I agree we should look for programs that are ineffective or inefficient, and prioritize that funding to programs that work best for students. I am confident we can work together throughout this year's budget process on that goal.

We have a shared priority in STEM education. I am interested in hearing more about your ideas on how the Department can support STEM education, including computer science education, in schools across the country, particularly rural schools. The Omnibus included \$50 million in dedicated funding for evidence-based STEM education programs and I want to work with you on how the Department can support and expand that effort as well as build upon the innovative work states and school districts are already doing in STEM education.

I am also interested in working together to make post-secondary education more accessible and affordable for all students. Two years ago, the Labor/HHS bill reinstated Year Round Pell Grants. Year-round Pell is expected to help approximately one million students nationwide each year, and 20,000 in my home state of Missouri, where one-third of students receive a Pell Grant. When I was in Missouri last month visiting community colleges and universities, I heard from students about the benefits of being able to take classes continuously. And this is the first summer most students are able to benefit.

Additionally, in the FY2018 Omnibus, we were able to build upon the success of Year-round Pell by funding several significant initiatives focused on college affordability and completion, including increasing the Pell Grant maximum award, increasing funding for campus-based aid programs like Federal Work Study, and focusing funding on TRIO programs to help students get

into and complete college. As the first person in my family to graduate college, I understand the importance of finding a system that works. Staying continuously enrolled in school, having support from programs like TRIO, and access to financial aid through Pell and campus-based aid programs will help more students stay on track for graduation, enter or re-enter the workforce sooner, and graduate with less debt.

We share a lot of common ground with regard to the role of the federal government in our education system. However, there are places we disagree. I continue to believe that certain elements of the Department's proposal on student loan servicing are misguided. The Omnibus bill prevents the Department from moving forward with a new system that does not include certain safeguards to promote accountability and transparency, and incentivize high-quality service for borrowers. I hope that we can work together this year to improve the federal student loan servicing process for borrowers, while making sure these safeguards are in place.

Further, many of the proposals in the budget request to eliminate programs were considered by our Subcommittee last year, and rejected. This Subcommittee will not pass a bill eliminating large formula grant programs supporting afterschool programs and teacher professional development. As we have done since the last Administration, our Labor/HHS bill will not support the elimination of the Impact Aid Payments for Federal Property program, which represents a core aspect of the federal government's commitment to the parts of the country impacted by the presence of federally-owned land. Similarly, while some small targeted grant programs, like Special Olympics or Arts in Education, may simply because of their size not have widespread impacts, they can help leverage significant private funding and build the evidence-base for what works to improve student outcomes. As we look to produce our third consecutive bipartisan Labor/HHS bill at the end of this month, I expect these proposals will face the same result this year.

Finally, Madame Secretary, I want to acknowledge your efforts to realign the Department of Education's role in our education system. I believe education decisions should be made as close to the student and family as possible. It is hard enough to make decisions for a student in Springfield, Missouri from Jefferson City, let alone Washington, D.C. We need to empower schools, students, and families to make the best decisions for individual students to help them succeed. I believe you are taking important steps to do that and limit the role of the federal government in both our elementary and secondary school system and at institutions of higher education. I will continue to support you in those efforts.

My goal is for us to continue to work together to identify priorities and find common ground while responsibly allocating taxpayers' resources. Madame Secretary, I look forward to hearing your testimony today and appreciate your dialogue with us about these important issues.

Thank you.

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