



**Give Priority to Federal Investment in Low-Income People: Testimony for the Record,
To the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the FY2018 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations on behalf of the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), a national, nonpartisan, anti-poverty organization advancing federal, state, and local policy solutions that work for low-income people. We are extremely concerned about rumored deep budget cuts for programs that help low-income workers, children, and families. Funding at sequester levels would force devastating cuts to crucial programs like Head Start, job training, and Pell grants, and even deeper cuts floated by the Trump Administration would fly in the face of research evidence, compassion, and our national stake in stable families, healthy children, and a skilled workforce.

More specifically, given the crucial role of federal investment in reducing poverty, promoting economic security for workers and their families who live below and near the poverty level, and creating pathways to opportunity for children, youth, and adults, we urge you to:

- Support non-defense discretionary funding at a level equal to or greater than defense;
- Prioritize investments in programs critical to low-income people; and
- Ensure that the Labor-HHS-Education allocation and specific line-item appropriations provide sufficient resources to: reverse the effects of recent cuts in vital programs (consistent with the proposals to break the caps for defense); enable low-income individuals and

families, including low-wage workers, to make ends meet; help low-skilled youth and adults move up to better jobs; and invest in young children.

Today, nearly one in five children and young adults live in poverty in the United States, most in a home with at least one worker. Millions more live in families struggling just above the poverty line. Yet funding for vital programs that support such children and families has shrunk over the years of budget stalemate, even though a growing body of research demonstrates the value of such public investments in child care and Head Start, workforce training and access to affordable postsecondary opportunities, labor standards, and investments in economic and educational opportunities for youth.

To reflect the strong evidence about the positive effects of public investment in low-income children, youth, families, and adults, and the deep damage created by slashing fundamental programs, we recommend that Labor-HHS allocations provide:

- **Critical employment and job training services and postsecondary education funding** that supports individuals' pathways out of poverty, including through the publicly funded workforce development system and community colleges that disproportionately serve low-income, under-prepared and/or adult students, many of whom are students of color. We urge the subcommittee to provide sufficient funding to sustain the Pell Grant program's current full maximum grant award and current levels of student eligibility, as well as maintaining crucial investments in other student financial assistance programs for low-income students, including federal work-study, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, and TRIO programs. We urge the subcommittee to fund the WIOA Title I Adult and Youth programs and the Adult and Family Literacy Act (WIOA Title II)

at these programs' full FY2018 authorized levels. In addition, we recommend that the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act be funded at least at the FY2016 level, and urge the subcommittee to provide at least FY2016 level funding for other important national programs such as Reentry Employment Opportunities and the Senior Community Service Employment Program.

- **Expanded funding and opportunities to achieve full employment for youth** through job training, youth entrepreneurship, career and technical skill building, service and conservation corps, paid internships, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeships, and other employment (including summer and year-round employment, national and community service, and service-learning). This can be achieved through adequately funding:
 - WIOA Title I Youth Activities, Job Corps, YouthBuild, Registered Apprenticeships, and Reentry Employment Opportunities under the Department of Labor; and
 - AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps, AmeriCorps State/National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and Social Innovation Fund under the Corporation for National and Community Service.
- Expanded funding and opportunities to **reach the full span of educational profiles of out-of-school and out-of-work youth**, ranging from well below sixth-grade literacy to levels just short of a secondary school credential and beyond, while addressing the needs of youth facing foster care involvement, homelessness, justice involvement, or disability. This can be achieved through adequately funding:

- ESSA Title I, Adult Education Basic Grants to States, IDEA – Part B, and Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment under the Department of Education.
- Expanded funding to **serve the nation’s most vulnerable youth** by providing wraparound supports, housing, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment services. This can be achieved through adequately funding:
 - Chafee Education and Training Vouchers, Community Services Block Grant, Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, Substance Abuse Prevention, and Treatment Block Grant under the Department of Health and Human Services.
- Strong **wage and hour enforcement** so all workers are paid the wages they have earned, employers comply with federal labor laws, and workers are protected from retaliation when they file complaints. We urge the subcommittee to provide sufficient funding for the Department of Labor’s Wage and Hour Division to sustain its current enforcement activities, including its strategic and targeted enforcement in industries that are known to be likely violators of the law. We also urge the subcommittee to continue to **invest in the development of state-level paid leave programs** by continuing to fund the Department of Labor’s Women’s Bureau, which has provided grants to states and localities to pursue feasibility and implementation research.
- Robust funding for the **Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start and Early Head Start** so that children and families continue to have access to affordable, high-quality early education options. Funding for CCDBG is important to provide resources so states can seize the opportunities in the 2014 bipartisan reauthorization of CCDBG to improve the health, safety, and quality of child care and to

reduce the burdens associated with receipt of financial assistance so that parents can more easily go to work or school and improve their family economic stability. Quality child care provides young children with the early childhood education experiences needed for healthy development. Despite the importance of child care assistance for low-income working families, CCDBG is serving the smallest number of children in its history. Approximately 373,100 fewer children received CCDBG-funded child care in 2015 than in 2006, representing a 21 percent reduction in the average monthly number of children served over nine years. Head Start and Early Head Start provide critical comprehensive early childhood development services to young children and their families with gains extending into adulthood. These programs are significantly underfunded with only half of eligible preschoolers and fewer than 5 percent of eligible infants and toddlers getting any help. Funding should be appropriated to make progress on the number of eligible children and families served, while supporting programs in meeting important quality standards.

The combination of these investments—along with a strong safety net—is exactly what supports low-income families and individuals to raise thriving children and to achieve and sustain economic security. Because of the crucial importance of all these supports at different points in a person’s or a family’s life, we oppose trade-offs that would seek to leverage cuts in one area to strengthen another. Further, as research amply demonstrates, in addition to strengthening the lives of the millions of people who struggle to get by, these investments ultimately benefit the nation’s overall economy. Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony. We would be delighted to provide more detailed information and citations and are also happy to respond to any questions.