



November 10, 2015

Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Vice Chairwoman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen, Vice Chairwoman, and Ranking Member,

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)—a national, nonpartisan, anti-poverty organization advancing policy solutions that work for low-income people—applauds you for your efforts in passing the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 (BBA), providing partial relief of the spending caps on discretionary spending in fiscal years (FY) 2016 and 2017.

We are writing to encourage Congress, with your leadership, to pass an omnibus spending bill that invests in those hit hardest by the extreme cuts in previous years—vulnerable, poor families. Today, nearly one in five children and young adults live in poverty in the United States; millions more live in families struggling to make ends meet, yet funding for vital programs that support these children and families has declined substantially over the years of budget stalemate. For example, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is reaching the smallest number of children in 15 years. Similarly, severe cuts to workforce, education, and training programs have hurt businesses and workers, especially young adults and the chronically unemployed, and threaten our economic competitiveness. As a result, the nation is missing out on major opportunities, such as last year's Congressional reauthorizations of both workforce development programs and child care assistance, both of which passed by large bipartisan majorities. Yet without significant additional investment, the important improvements made by these laws will be largely empty promises.

As you decide on 302(b) allocations and individual program funding levels in the omnibus FY 2016 appropriations bill, we urge you to invest in programs that will serve to repair large funding gaps in the safety net. In particular, the Labor-HHS-Education section of the omnibus bill must provide sufficient resources to address the damaging effects of low-wage work, to help low-skilled youth and adults move up to better jobs, to invest in young children, and to support a two-generational approach so both parents and children can escape poverty.

Therefore, we recommend Labor-HHS allocations provide:

### **Child Care and Early Learning**

- Increased funding for CCDBG to help raise the number of children served to begin to reverse the negative trend, enable parents to work and children to have stable, quality child care settings, and help states implement costly provisions in the 2014 CCDBG Reauthorization;
- Increased funding for Head Start to enable programs to begin to expand access to full-school-day, full-school-year services, which research demonstrates is a critical element of ensuring quality and for Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care partnerships—which help child care providers meet Early Head Start’s higher-quality standards; and
- Restoration of Preschool Development grants that are supporting state-led efforts both to offer preschool and to improve the quality of that experience for four-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families.

### **Education, Workforce Development, and Careers**

- Full funding for all Titles in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) at statutorily authorized FY 2016 levels, so states and local areas and other partners in the public workforce system can fully realize the bipartisan vision outlined by WIOA; train the next generation of workers so they can become productive citizens, achieve their career goals, and contribute to their local community; and ensure that the 36 million Americans with low basic skills are able to strengthen their educational levels in order to take advantage of emerging economic opportunities;
- Restored funding for the Perkins basic state grant program to pre-sequester levels to support our nation’s high schools, technical centers, and community colleges in developing the highly skilled workforce demanded by employers;
- Full funding for Pell Grants—the foundational student aid program that is critical to higher education access for low-income students—as well as Work-Study and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG), which provide important need-based aid in a time when the average unmet financial need for the lowest-income students is over \$10,000; and
- Full funding for the Department of Labor’s and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s enforcement of wage and hour laws, including work leave and at least the \$35 million the President requested for the State Paid Leave Fund, which would help design programs to assist working families, children and seniors when work leave is needed for a serious illness or the birth/adoption of a child.

We consider each of these issue areas of crucial importance across an individuals’ life cycle and would discourage trade-offs that would seek to leverage cuts in one area to strengthen another.

We also urge you to ensure that the spending bill contains no harmful policy riders that could lead to an unnecessary government shutdown and cause harm to the very children and families that need support from these key investments. Building on the bipartisan agreement in the BBA, Congress should provide increased FY 2016 funding for key Labor-HHS-Education investments in America’s most vulnerable families that are critical to their future success.

If you have questions about this letter, please contact Stephanie Schmit, legislative coordinator at CLASP ([sschmit@clasp.org](mailto:sschmit@clasp.org)). Thank you for your leadership and attention to these important matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Olivia Golden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Olivia Golden

Executive Director

Center for Law and Social Policy