



National Coalition for Literacy

November 12, 2014

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
H-305 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairwoman
Senate Appropriations Committee
S-128 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
S-146A Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

The National Coalition for Literacy, a coalition of more than 30 leading national, state, and regional organizations dedicated to advancing adult education, family literacy, and English language acquisition in the U.S., urges you to enact an omnibus spending bill for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 before the end of the calendar year.

We further urge you to increase funding for Adult Education at the \$609 million level proposed in the Labor-HHS-Education bill released by Representative Rosa DeLauro in September.

An omnibus bill would honor the work completed by your committees over the course of this year as well as the bipartisan budget agreement reached by the two chambers in 2013. The alternative—a Continuing Resolution (CR), which treats all programs equally—would be, in effect, a relinquishment of Congress's authority and responsibility to make program-by-program funding decisions and provide necessary guidance to the Administration in implementing programs in FY 2015.

Unlike many other programs, **adult education state grants had none of its sequestered funds restored in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act.** The increase in funding for adult education proposed in Representative DeLauro's Labor-HHS-Education bill **would restore state adult education grants to the pre-sequester level of \$595 million**, while also maintaining the \$14 million for adult education national leadership programs that was included in the FY 2014 Act (a modest rise from the previous year's sequestered level).¹

The most recent data on skill levels in the U.S. show that **36 million adults** have low basic skills and would benefit from access to basic skills education. Yet more than a decade of divestment in the federal adult education system—a decline of 25 percent in real terms since 2002—has resulted in significant drops in the number of students that we are able to serve, falling from 1.8 million to 1.7 million for the last program years for which we have data (2012-13)—a drop of almost 111,000 people. Across the country, prospective students remain on waiting lists, sometimes for more than a year.

¹ The bill approved by the Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee included a more modest increase in funding for adult education of \$12.9 million. We supported this increase as a step in the right direction, although it would not fully restore the program to pre-sequester levels, as the House Democrats' proposal does.

Moreover, the effectiveness of the recently passed Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) will be severely impaired if we do not reverse the recent trend of *cutting* funding for adult education program covered under the new Act.

An omnibus appropriations bill also provides Congress with the opportunity to consider two additional opportunities to strengthen the Act, which we strongly support:

1. **Restoration of “ability-to-benefit” under the Pell grant program**—since July of 2012, students who do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent, even if they can demonstrate college readiness, are no longer eligible for any federal tuition assistance. Formerly, these students qualified for financial aid under the “ability to benefit” (ATB) provisions in Title IV of the Higher Education Act. These provisions were eliminated as a cost-savings measure as part of the FY 2012 omnibus legislation. ATB is particularly important for low-skilled individuals participating in career pathways programs (heavily emphasized in WIOA), which combine basic adult education with occupational training. The bill passed by the Senate Labor-H Appropriations subcommittee partially restored this provision.
2. **Funding for WIOA Implementation**—WIOA creates a number of new demands on states and local communities. For Title II programs in particular, effective career pathway and integrated program models—and the use of technology—can be challenging and costly to implement and require intensive professional development up front. It is unrealistic to expect states and local communities to fully pay for the costs associated with these up front activities solely out of the existing formula funding—which again, has been declining at the federal level in recent years. We therefore support the request by the [Campaign to Invest in America’s Workforce](#) to provide at least \$250 million in additional WIOA implementation funding above and beyond any regular program appropriations.

We understand the overall FY 2015 cap for nondefense discretionary programs is very tight and you must make very difficult choices. Nevertheless, we urge the Committee to take action on an omnibus bill and avoid a Continuing Resolution, which would foreclose any possibility of targeted funding increases, including the much-needed re-investment in our nation’s adult learners and workers that is so desperately needed. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (jcarter@literacypolicy.org or jeff@digitalpromise.org).

Sincerely,



Jeff Carter
NCL President 2014-2015

Cc: Members, House and Senate Appropriations Committee