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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

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March 21, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Dear Chair Sanders,

I write to request a HELP Committee hearing with Education Secretary Miguel Cardona regarding the Biden Administration's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2025 and overall agency operations. As the authorizing committee for the Department of Education (DeptEd), this is our responsibility.

The DeptEd has a poor track record of spending money on politically motivated projects rather than Congressional mandated policies and has not been publicly held to account for these choices. The recent botched rollout of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a prime example of DeptEd prioritizing student loan schemes over its basic responsibilities mandated by Congress and essential to American families. The new FAFSA was supposed to make applying for financial aid for college easier; however, the roll-out has been a prolonged fiasco that has left millions of students and families worse off.

With students at the top of mind, it is concerning to see many programs that seem common-sense to the average American either cut or flat-funded in the President's budget.

The 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) of fourth-grade students shows that only about a third of students are proficient in reading and math. For eighth graders the numbers are more concerning, so it is disheartening the lack of support to improve primary and secondary school instruction.¹ The President's budget also cuts the charter school program when over one million students are on a waitlist to attend one, another disservice to families.²

Furthermore, the Secretary should also explain decisions to support the administration's social policies over the classroom needs of students. This includes flat-funding programs for Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native, and rural communities, while increasing support for English learners,

¹ <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/reading/2022/>;
<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/mathematics/2022/>

² <https://edreform.com/2021/03/just-the-faqs-charter-schools/>

23 percent of whom are non-citizens.³ This budget would also increase funding to full-service community schools, despite concerns about the appropriateness of and parental involvement in services provided at these schools.⁴

Most authorizing committees hold budget hearings with their respective cabinet agencies so that the members of the authorizing committee can better understand the proposed budget request. Such a hearing is at the heart of our role in oversight of the agencies under our jurisdiction and in remaining accountable to American taxpayers.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Bill Cassidy, M.D. in blue ink.

Bill Cassidy, M.D.
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions

³ <https://edreform.com/2021/03/just-the-facts-charter-schools/>

⁴ <https://www.help.senate.gov/ranking/newsroom/press/ranking-member-cassidy-urges-chair-sanders-to-ensure-pro-life-protections-protect-parental-consent-in-funding-for-school-based-health-centers>