

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 10, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
United States Senate Committee on Health,  
Education, Labor and Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
United States Senate Committee on Health,  
Education, Labor and Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

As you know, teachers, paraprofessionals and school staff in public elementary and secondary schools, as well as faculty and staff members in higher education, are overwhelmed by the impacts of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Many of them worry about their students' health and education, their health and their families' health, the health of their community, and given significant losses in State and local revenue, the pandemic's lasting impact on public education. There has been no additional relief package passed by the Senate or enacted into law to help public schools and educators since the passage of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Although the CARES Act was a good step in providing financial resources to State and local governments, it was not enough to help address existing challenges facing our Nation's education workforce now exacerbated by the pandemic.

If schools do not receive additional funds needed to teach our country's most vulnerable children, our nation will face an unparalleled education workforce shortage—with a net loss of approximately 1.9 million education jobs over the next three years. The teacher shortage in States like Mississippi, Tennessee, Washington, Nevada and Indiana could be worse off over the next few years than what was experienced during the Great Recession of 2008, which led to more than 433,000 education job losses nationally. Today, State and local budgets are strained and State school administrators face significant budget cuts, possibly leading to more layoffs and leaving schools without essential staff.

Many of the first jobs to be cut will be the school and college support staff, who are the backbone of our schools. It has been during COVID-19 that many of these professionals have stepped forward to help the academic community since they have been the ones to deliver school meals, help with technology, support teachers in virtual breakout rooms, take attendance and do wellness checks. During a time in which our students need social and emotional support more than ever, the school and college support staff are the ones that can give that. Since so many support staff live and work in the communities of the schools, they know the students and their families and know how to best support them during in-person, hybrid and/or remote learning.

A recent survey showed that one in three teachers say the pandemic has made them more likely to leave teaching earlier than they originally planned. Without immediate Federal intervention, an overwhelming number of teachers are worried about being infected at work. Due to the lack of adequate funding to follow the safety protocols, many experienced teachers and staff are considering early retirement or leaving the profession due to concerns about their safety and the

safety of their students, families and colleagues. This is being considered more in teachers who are over the age of 50, have over 20 years in the profession or who live in the South.

In October, the Nation suffered a loss of over 61,000 State education jobs and 98,000 local education jobs. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have lost approximately 1 million jobs in the education workforce. Those are teachers, classroom assistants, social workers, school nurses and others working to keep our students engaged and supported during this crisis. As of early July, approximately 51,793 faculty, staff and other employees at 224 institutions of higher education had lost their jobs. In Illinois, for example, more than 48,500 educator jobs in K-12 and higher education could be lost from the estimated decline in State revenue if no additional Federal relief is provided.

This would also have a disproportionate and devastating impact on Title I schools that serve the largest number of students from families with low-incomes. Title I schools already experience a higher teacher turnover rate and frequently lack well prepared and highly experienced teachers—and—COVID-19 will aggravate these issues even more with some schools lowering certification requirements to fill teacher gaps during the pandemic. Lowering certification requirements is poor practice, as fast-track alternative licensure programs lead to even higher turnover rates due to lack of proper preparation. Title I schools also experience financial shortfalls, exacerbated by school instability and teacher retention difficulties.

To help public schools, including Title I schools, and institutions of higher education prepare for a safe reopening, we urge Chairman Alexander to consider S. 4112, the Coronavirus Child Care and Education Relief Act and favorably report the bill out of Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. This \$430 billion bill would assist child care providers, State and local school entities and colleges with providing students with a high-quality virtual education; addressing learning losses; purchasing personal protective equipment; safely reopening their brick-and-mortar facilities; and preserving teacher jobs. As cosponsors of this legislation, we support this bill being brought to the Senate floor for a vote so we can help teachers, paraprofessionals, school staff and higher education faculty, who are essential workers, receive the Federal aid they desperately need so our students can access a safe and high-quality education.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Tammy Duckworth*

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TAMMY DUCKWORTH  
United States Senator

*/s/ Richard J. Durbin*

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RICHARD J. DURBIN  
United States Senator