

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

Thank you for your support for the Adult Education State Grant Program in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020. The increased funding will strengthen adult education programs and put more adults on a pathway to greater career opportunities and enhanced economic security. As you consider the FY 2021 Appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, we urge you to continue to expand opportunities for adult learners by including \$692 million for the Adult Education State Grant Program.

The need to strengthen the skills base of working adults continues to grow. Increasingly, middle-skill and sustainable wage jobs require education beyond high school. Yet, according to U.S. Census data, more than 22 million working age adults have less than a high school diploma. Moreover, over 40 million adults in the U.S. have low skills, with nearly one in six having low literacy skills and one in three having low numeracy skills. These adults are less likely to be able to transition to higher-level jobs and more likely to be unemployed: as of January 2020, the unemployment rate was under three percent for adults with at least some college, but 5.5 percent for those with less than a high school diploma or equivalent.

Adult education can make a transformative difference for these Americans – economically and socially. Research shows that adult participants in basic skills programs experience mean income gains of 53 percent over ten years, compared with an income drop of two percent for nonparticipants. The federal and state tax dollars realized through these income gains represent a noteworthy return on investment for the average annual expenditure of \$1,021 per adult learner. Additionally, adults who participate in basic skills instruction for 100 hours or more demonstrate a substantial increase in their literacy skills. They are also significantly more likely to achieve a high school credential, improve their skills after program completion, and enter postsecondary education and receive credits, as well as vote in national elections.

Through adult education programs, participants develop the literacy, numeracy, and digital skills they need to succeed and thrive in the workplace and the community. However, existing programs are able to serve fewer than ten percent of those in need, and many have long waiting lists. In addition, programs have limited ability to provide the supportive services, such as job counseling, child care, and transportation that enable working class adults to persist in pursuing their educational goals. To enable programs to continue strengthening the social and economic fabric of the United States through their vital work with these adults, we urge you to

support increasing funding for the Adult Education State Grant program to \$692 million for FY 2021.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

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Jack Reed  
United States Senator

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Todd Young  
United States Senator

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Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

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Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator

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Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

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Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

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Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

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Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

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Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

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Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

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Tina Smith  
United States Senator

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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

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Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

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Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

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Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

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Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator