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September 5, 2018

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
260 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole   
Chairman   
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
 2467 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro   
Ranking Member  
 House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
 2413 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

On behalf of SPARC, a coalition including more than 200 academic and research libraries spanning nearly every state, **I write to urge you to maintain the \$5 million investment in the Open Textbook Pilot in the Fiscal Year 2019 Senate-passed Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill as you work to create a final bill. We also ask that, in addition to maintaining the report language for the Pilot in Senate Report 115-137, that you include clarifying language to ensure the program is implemented to achieve the greatest savings for students.** SPARC's community has a strong interest in advancing the creation and use of open textbooks, and we believe that the Open Textbook Pilot is a crucial opportunity to save students millions of dollars in college costs while improving teaching and learning outcomes.

College textbook prices have risen 88% over the last decade, becoming a significant financial burden for students.<sup>1</sup> Despite the increased availability of stop-gap measures such as used

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2016/college-tuition-and-fees-increase-63-percent-since-january-2006.htm>

books, rentals, and subscriptions, many students report having to forgo buying textbooks due to cost.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the traditional publishing industry has used digital technology to further restrict, rather than expand, access to materials through access codes and expiration dates.

Open textbooks are an important strategy for effectively leveraging digital technology to expand equitable access to course materials and improve student outcomes. Open textbooks are high-quality educational resources that are freely available to download, edit, and share to better serve all students. In addition to being free of cost in digital form, these resources carry an open license allowing professors to tailor textbooks to better suit their courses and local contexts. They can also be printed and bound for a significantly reduced cost, or converted to audiobooks and other accessible formats to aid students with disabilities.

Open textbooks have not only been found to substantially reduce costs,<sup>3</sup> but also improve student learning outcomes. A new study of students at the University of Georgia found that students who switched to open textbooks not only achieved higher grades overall, but that there were proportionately greater increases for students traditionally underserved by higher education, including Pell-eligible students, students of color, and part-time students.<sup>4</sup>

The Open Textbook Pilot supports projects to expand the creation and use of open textbooks at colleges and universities, which will bring immediate financial relief to students and advance educational practices that truly serve all learners. While many institutions are already actively taking steps to advance open textbooks, Pilot grant funding would help colleges and universities eager to jumpstart and accelerate open textbook programs to benefit of students.

Our community responded with resounding enthusiasm to the opportunity to apply for the first round of Open Textbook Pilot funding in Fiscal Year 2018; at our last count, more than a dozen applications were being submitted by members of our community alone. However, several aspects of the Department of Education's implementation limited participation by many interested institutions among our membership—the short application window during the busiest time of year, the high stakes of only a few possible grants, and the high dollar amount of awards that all but excluded less-resourced institutions without the capacity to process large federal grants, including many community colleges.

We were also concerned by the Department's decision to incentivize the development of technologies to integrate with open textbooks, yet to not include these technologies under the open licensing requirement set by Congress. The goal of this program is to support the creation and expanded use of open textbooks, and it is critical that these textbooks—including any integrated materials or technologies—are licensed for unlimited use by the public in order to achieve the greatest savings for students.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.openaccesstextbooks.org/pdf/2016\\_Florida\\_Student\\_Textbook\\_Survey.pdf](http://www.openaccesstextbooks.org/pdf/2016_Florida_Student_Textbook_Survey.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://studentpirgs.org/sites/student/files/reports/The%20Billion%20Dollar%20Solution.pdf>

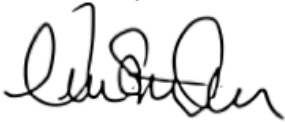
<sup>4</sup> <http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/pdf/IJTLHE3386.pdf>

We are supportive of the language included for the Open Textbook Pilot in Senate Report 115-137, which lays out allowable uses of funds and adds a reporting requirement to ensure the outcomes of grants are shared with the public. We ask that you maintain this language, and also include the following clarifying language to address concerns raised by our community:

*“The Conferees recommend that the Secretary award the funds provided in this bill through a new competition and make not less than 20 new grants with individual grants amounting to not less than \$100,000 and not more than \$1,000,000. The Conferees recommend that the application deadline for the notice inviting grant applications for Fiscal Year 2019 be not less than 60 days from the date the notice is published. Any tools, technologies, or other resources that are created, developed, or improved wholly or in part with Pilot funds for use with an open textbook must be licensed under a worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free, perpetual, and irrevocable license to the public to exercise any of the rights under copyright conditioned only on the requirement that attribution be given as directed by the copyright owner.”*

There is a robust and motivated community ready to put future funds in this pilot to immediate and impactful use to achieve savings for students who need our help to afford an education. We are thankful for you answering our call to action with the creation of the Open Textbook Pilot in Fiscal Year 2018. Now we are counting on you to renew and strengthen this investment as you finalize the Fiscal Year 2019 appropriations to make textbooks more affordable for students across the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Allen', written in a cursive style.

Nicole Allen  
Director of Open Education