

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 13, 2018

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

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

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

Thank you for providing \$5 million in the recently completed Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Omnibus appropriations bill for a pilot program to support the creation and expand the sustainable use of quality open college textbooks. We write today to ask that you build on this initial federal investment by including \$10 million in the FY 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-H) appropriations bill for the pilot program. Open textbooks help make the cost of college more affordable for students and can improve educational outcomes by ensuring students are not forced to do without required course materials due to cost.

Textbook costs are one of the most overlooked costs of going to college, but they can be substantial and create an unnecessary barrier to completion. Unlike tuition and many of the other costs associated with college, students often feel textbook costs up front. The College Board estimates that the average student at a four-year public institution of higher education spent \$1,250 on college books and supplies during the 2017-18 academic year. A single book can often cost hundreds of dollars.

And over the years, those prices have continued to climb. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index, textbook prices increased by nearly 90 percent between 2006 and 2016. As a result of these high costs, some students do not purchase required course materials – putting themselves at an academic disadvantage. A survey by U.S. PIRG found that 65 percent of students decided not to buy a textbook because of the cost and 94 percent of those students worried it would negatively affect their grade.

Open textbooks – educational resources that are licensed under an open license and made available free of charge to the public – provide quality alternatives to traditional textbooks. Each time a faculty member substitutes a traditional textbook with an open textbook, students save money. But over time, the expanded use of open textbooks has the potential to inject healthy competition into the traditional textbook market – bringing overall prices down. Open textbooks

can also improve instruction by providing greater flexibility for faculty members to adapt and customize materials to meet their specific needs.

Open textbooks are beginning to be embraced by colleges and universities as both an affordability tool and a way to improve student learning outcomes. Some states have also begun investing in open textbooks and seen proven results – with projects in North Dakota and Georgia estimated to have saved students more than ten times the original investment. Additional federal support at this critical juncture would greatly increase the impact for students.

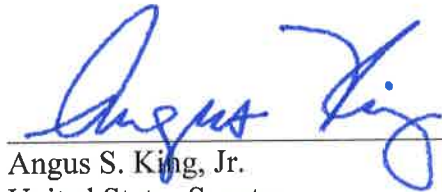
Students across the country are calling on us to make college more affordable. Thank you for hearing those calls in FY 2018 and providing the first ever dedicated federal investment for open textbooks. We urge you to continue to stand with students and build on that investment as you develop the FY 2019 Labor-H appropriations bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



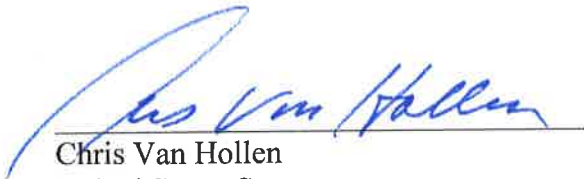
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United States Senator



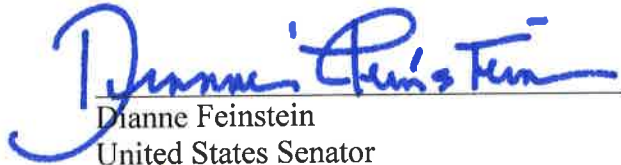
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Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



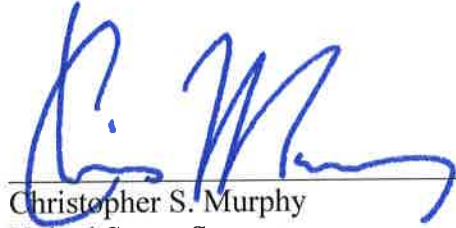
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



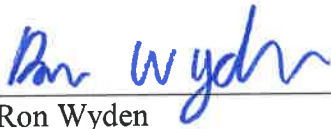
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Benjamin L. Cardin  
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Kamala D. Harris  
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