

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2019

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 both Fiscal Years (FY) 2018 and 2019 for the Open Textbooks Pilot at the Department of Education (ED) to support the creation and expand the sustainable use of quality open college textbooks. We write today to ask that you build on this multi-year federal investment by providing \$10 million to support new Pilot grants in FY 2020.

Open textbooks—educational resources freely available to the public under an open license—help reduce the cost of college for students and can improve educational outcomes by ensuring students do not forgo required course materials due to cost. 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.

Unlike tuition and other costs of college, textbook costs are often felt by students up front. The College Board estimates that the average student budget at a four-year public institution of higher education for books and supplies was \$1,240 during the 2018-19 academic year. A single traditional textbook can often cost hundreds of dollars.

Open textbooks provide quality alternatives to traditional textbooks. Each time a faculty member substitutes a traditional textbook with an open textbook, students save money. 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.

We look forward to the projected \$30 million in savings for students over five years resulting from the projects—led by the University of California-Davis, Arizona State University, and Chippewa Valley Technical College—funded by the FY 2018 and FY 2019 Pilot appropriations. At the same time, we must ensure that ED carries out additional federal investment in the Pilot as Congress intends. The initial investment in FY 2018 generated great interest and excitement from the higher education community across the country. To ensure broad participation, increased buy-in from institutions of higher education across the country, and maximum impact to students, the Report to accompany the Department of Defense and Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Act (H. Rept. 115-952) specifically directed ED to open a new competition in FY 2019 and provide at least 20 new grants. Unfortunately, ED did not comply—awarding only two new FY 2019 grants using the FY 2018 slate of applications. Therefore, we request this directive be repeated in bill language in FY 2020.

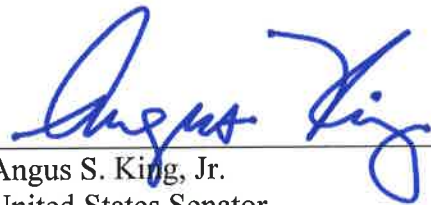
Previous federal investments in the Open Textbooks Pilot show a bipartisan commitment to making college more affordable for students and families. We urge you to continue this commitment in FY 2020.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



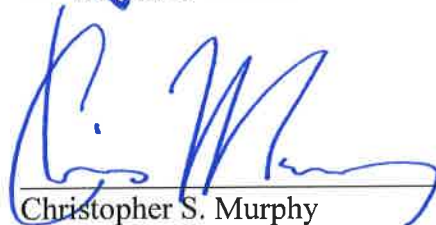
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United States Senator



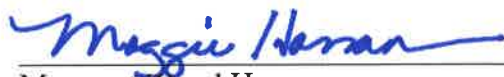
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Mazie K. Hirono
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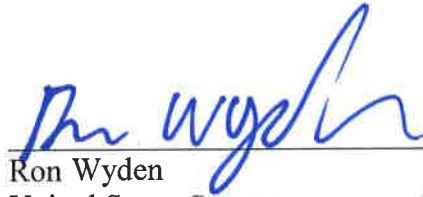
Jeffrey A. Merkley
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Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



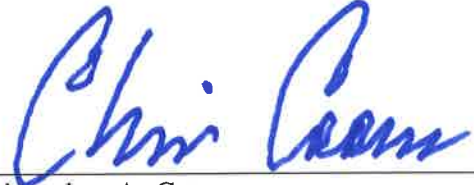
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Maria Cantwell
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