Omnibus Spending Bill Provides Increased Investments for School Safety and Mental Health Services

Bethesda, MD—The National Association of School Psychologists applauds Congress for introducing an omnibus spending bill that provides meaningful investments to help schools meet the needs of all students. We are particularly pleased to see increases for Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Title IV of ESSA, which support the systems, personnel, services, supports, and resources necessary to promote student’s academic success, social–emotional well-being, and mental and behavioral health. Among the most important provisions are:

**Increased funding for Title I and IDEA.** These funds will help ensure that our nation’s most vulnerable students—those living in poverty and those with disabilities—have access to the supports they need to be successful in school. Such supports include access to specialized instructional support personnel who can provide evidence-based academic, social–emotional, and mental and behavioral health interventions to help lower barriers to learning for all students. Historically, Congress has never lived up to its promise to fully fund IDEA. Although the modest increase in funding via Title I is welcome, we urge Congress to live up to the promise made when the law was passed in 1975.

**Significant increases in funding for comprehensive school safety and mental health services.** Our children cannot learn unless they feel safe. Whether as a result of bullying, lack of school connectedness, gang activity, community violence, or concern over gun violence, many students and staff feel unsafe. Schools across the country are grappling with how to reinforce school safety on a daily basis and provide for students’ mental health needs in a way supports learning while also preparing for the unthinkable, like the tragic shooting in Parkland, Florida. A number of provisions in this bill will help support efforts to create safe schools and communities. Specifically, we are pleased that Congress proposes:

- $1.1 billion for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant (Title IV-Part A). This funding level is almost three times as high as FY18 levels and recognizes the importance of providing a well-rounded curriculum and improving student health and safety. Funding at this level will allow states and districts to make meaningful investments in critical programs, including improving access to comprehensive school mental health services; improving the
ratios of school psychologists and other school employed mental health professionals; and improving school safety and preventing school violence.

- $90 million for Safe and Drug Free Schools National Activities. These funds will be used to expand evidence-based programs to ensure safe learning environments for students and educators, including improving school climate, preventing violence in schools, and providing services in response to serious incidents. $5 million of these funds are reserved for Project SERV, which helps schools recover after events of violence.

- $75 million for Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training Grants, and $36.9 million for Mental and Behavioral Health Education training. The funds are intended to help recruit and train mental and behavioral health professionals, including school psychologists.

- $71 million for Project Aware. This program raises awareness of mental health issues and connects young people experiencing behavioral health issues, as well as their families, with needed services.

Students, families, educators, communities, and the nation will benefit from significant increases for programs intended to improve access to high quality school-based mental and behavioral health care, violence prevention activities, and other efforts to promote a positive school climate and improve school safety. This is a bold step in the right direction for our schools and, ultimately, for the future of the country.

We are also encouraged that this bill addresses certain aspects of gun safety. This legislation rightly includes provisions to improve the national background check system and clarifies that the Center for Disease Control does have the authority to conduct research on the causes of gun violence. We hope this clarification results in rigorous research on this issue, and that the data will guide policy changes to add to the existing body of research highlighting the relationship between access to weapons and incidents of gun violence in this country. We also urge Congress to engage in meaningful efforts to reduce inappropriate access to weapons, including banning weapons intended to do mass destruction in a short amount of time and creating pathways to remove guns from those who are deemed to be a threat to themselves or others.

We commend the House of Representatives for passing the bill this morning and urge the Senate to do so as well. We request that FY19 appropriations maintain or increase investments in these critical programs.

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