

November 9, 2023

The Honorable Thomas Cole  
Chair  
Committee on Rules  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable James McGovern  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Rules  
U.S. House of Representatives

Re: Opposition to H.R. 5894, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Act, Fiscal Year 2024

Dear Chair Cole and Ranking Member McGovern:

On behalf of the undersigned education and civil rights organizations, we write with urgent concern and strong opposition to the proposed fiscal year 2024 bill for Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies being considered by the Committee on Rules. As written, the bill significantly underfunds public education and includes a series of extreme poison-pill riders that put students and schools at risk of adverse outcomes. We urge the Committee to reject this bill.

The proposed legislation includes steep cuts that will impact the ability of local education agencies to adequately staff schools and support healthy learning environments for all students. The bill would exacerbate educator shortages with staggering cuts to Title I funding for schools serving low-income communities and Title II-A professional development programs – driving more than 220,000 teachers out of classrooms and devastating pipelines to recruit and retain high-quality educators.

The bill also includes a roughly \$300 million cut to school mental health services under Title IV-A, leaving schools understaffed to address the national youth mental health crisis. Suicide remains the second-leading cause of death among youth age 10-24, with a [sharp 7.7% increase in 2021](#). **This bill fails students and communities by underfunding school mental health services and including poison-pill riders that undermine school efforts to address bullying, harassment, and discrimination.**

Section 311 of the proposed bill would block implementation of urgently needed updates to Title IX proposed by the U.S. Department of Education. [GLSEN's National School Climate Survey](#) identified that 82% of LGBTQ+ students feel unsafe in school. LGBTQ+ students face higher rates of bullying, verbal and physical harassment, and discrimination in school settings, impacting their educational achievement and mental health. In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court recognized in *Bostock v. Clayton County* that federal Civil Rights law prohibiting sex discrimination protects individuals on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Comprehensive policies that enumerate protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity are demonstrated to improve school climates, with lower rates of derogatory remarks and anti-LGBTQ+ victimization, higher likelihood of staff intervening during bullying and affirming students' identities, and reduced absenteeism. The bill's misguided attempt to block clarity for local education agencies and enforcement of federal Civil Rights law will only reinforce disparities in discrimination, bullying, and harassment, hampering the efforts of educators and other community stakeholders to address the youth mental health crisis.

Furthermore, the bill before the Committee on Rules added Section 317, an overbroad and extreme provision that would pull funding from schools that affirm transgender students in a broad range of athletics activities. Nearly half of transgender and nonbinary students (46%) are prevented from playing on a school sports team consistent with their gender identity, but students in schools with inclusive policies report a 74% lower likelihood of experiencing discrimination. This last-minute addition to the bill is a radical effort to impose discriminatory policies on local education agencies, forcing school administrators to choose between students that are already participating in athletics activities and funding that reaches the broader school community. It is a false choice that the Committee should reject.

Strong investment in public education is the key to unleashing the potential of the next generation, and all students should be supported with safe and inclusive learning environments. Through underinvestment and poison-pill riders, this bill fails to meet the needs of America's students. We respectfully urge the Committee to reject this proposed bill and encourage appropriators to instead engage in good-faith negotiations that will assure a bipartisan, bicameral product. If you have any questions or would like to connect further about this letter, please reach out to Brian Dittmeier, Director of Public Policy at GLSEN, at [brian@glSEN.org](mailto:brian@glSEN.org).

Sincerely,

GLSEN

Advocates for Youth

American Atheists

American Federation of Teachers

American Psychological Association Services

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Athlete Ally

California LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network

CenterLink: The Community of LGBTQ Centers

Central Coast Coalition for Inclusive Schools

Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

Coalition on Human Needs

Committee for Children

Council of Administrators of Special Education

EDGE Consulting Partners

Education Law Center

Education Reform Now

Educators for Excellence

Empire Justice Center

Equality California

Feminist Majority Foundation

FORGE, Inc.

Human Rights Campaign

Interfaith Alliance

Know Your IX

Lyon-Martin Community Health Services

Movement Advancement Project

National Association of School Psychologists

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP)

National Center for Transgender Equality

National Education Association

National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund

National LGBTQ+ Bar Association

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Parent Advocacy Consortium

PFLAG National

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Silver State Equality - Nevada

Somos Familia Valle

The Education Trust

The Trevor Project

Transgender Resource, Advocacy and Network Service

TransYouth Liberation

Union for Reform Judaism