

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 28, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health, and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health, and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

Thank you for your continued support of the Open Textbooks Pilot at the Department of Education (ED) to support the creation and expand the sustainable use of quality open college textbooks to achieve savings for students. Your leadership in securing \$7 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 brings the total federal investment to \$24 million over the last four fiscal years. It is estimated that the projects supported to date will result in more than \$220 million in eventual savings to students—a meaningful return on federal investment. We write today to ask that you continue to build on this multi-year federal investment by providing \$25 million to support the Pilot in FY 2022.

Unlike tuition and other costs of college, textbook costs are often felt by students on the front end. Textbook costs increased 88 percent between 2006 and 2016 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The College Board estimates that the average student budget at a four-year public institution of higher education for books and supplies was \$1,298 during the 2020-2021 academic year. A single traditional textbook can often cost hundreds of dollars.

Open textbooks are educational resources freely available to the public under an open license and 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.

Open textbooks, not only help reduce the cost of college for students, but their use can improve educational outcomes by ensuring students are not forced to forgo required course materials due to cost. A 2020 survey by U.S. PIRG found that 65 percent of students decided not to buy a textbook because of the cost and 90 percent of those students worried it would negatively affect their grade. Low-income and students of color are most often negatively impacted by not being able to afford class materials. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the financial challenges of these students in continuing their college education.

That same U.S. PIRG survey found 82 percent of students who reported missing a meal due to the pandemic also reported forgoing buying textbooks because of the cost. The resulting shift to remote learning of the pandemic has also created access issues related to traditional textbooks beyond cost—something free, online materials could solve.

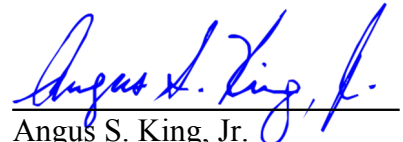
There is growing demand among the higher education community for this program. In the most recent competition, ED received more than 30 applications for projects but was only able to fund an additional four. We believe an increase to \$25 million in FY22 is needed to keep up the exciting momentum this program has built toward increasing savings for students over its few short years in existence. Additional funds mean that more projects can be funded and more savings for a greater number of students can be achieved. Previous federal investments in the Open Textbook Pilot show a bipartisan commitment to making college more affordable for students and families. We respectfully urge you to grow this commitment in FY 2022.

Thank you for your consideration.


Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



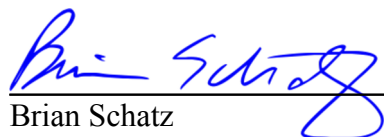
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



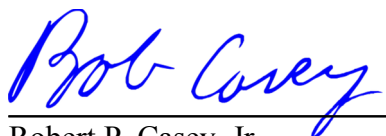
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



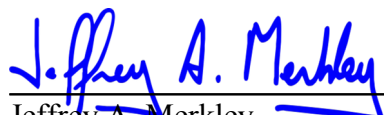
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



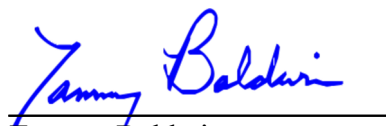
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



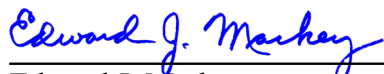
Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



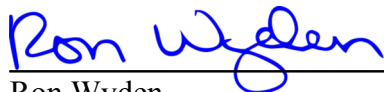
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Raphael G. Warnock
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex Padilla". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent dot over the 'i' in "Padilla".

Alex Padilla
United States Senator