



February 11, 2021

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.,
Chairman
and
The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers,
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

On behalf of the 1.7 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, including nearly 200,000 nurses and healthcare professionals, I write in strong support of the fiscal year 2021 budget reconciliation language being considered in your committee. This language is an integral part of President Joe Biden's bold, broad \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 rescue plan, which this country desperately needs, and it will provide help for struggling Americans across the nation.

Every person in America deserves the freedom to thrive, fueled by opportunity, justice and a voice in our democracy. That requires not only addressing the multiple crises affecting our country—COVID-19, the economic fallout and inequity, racial injustice, and threats to our democracy—but also creating the just and equitable conditions for economic and educational opportunity for all.

We are pleased to see that the FY21 budget reconciliation bill in the Committee on Energy and Commerce follows the contours of President Biden's American Rescue Plan. Importantly, this bill includes:

- \$46 billion to the Department of Health and Human Services for a national COVID-19 mitigation strategy that includes supporting the development, manufacturing, procurement, distribution, and administration of tests, personal protective equipment and other supplies necessary for COVID-19 testing.
- \$80 million for mental and behavioral health training for healthcare professionals, paraprofessionals and public safety officers.
- \$7.6 billion for community health centers.
- \$7.6 billion for the Emergency Connectivity Fund to help students and teachers manage distance learning by supporting schools and libraries in providing needed equipment and services.
- Extending Medicaid support to new mothers for up to 12 months postpartum.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
AFT PSRP
AFT Higher Education
AFT Public Employees
AFT Nurses and Health
Professionals

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- \$7.6 billion to support a public health workforce.
- \$50 million to the Environmental Protection Agency for environmental justice grants and activities.
- \$3.5 billion for substance abuse and mental health programs.
- Incentives for hesitant states to expand Medicaid.
- \$750 million to help address global health needs.
- \$4.5 billion for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program.
- \$10 million for the National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network.

Even after multiple emergency aid packages passed in the last Congress, healthcare professionals still lack the PPE, access to paid leave and workforce protections they desperately need and deserve. The pandemic has shown the glaring lack of an adequate public health infrastructure, and it has laid bare the impact of healthcare inequities and structural racism. This bill is badly needed to give families and communities the chance to thrive after so many months, and years, of pain.

I commend you for your leadership in moving this important bill forward and look forward to working with you to get this and the other parts of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan signed into law as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Randi Weingarten
President

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