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*We write to express the urgent need for Congress to do the following:*

- 1. End all federal funding for police in schools*
- 2. End the COPS program*
- 3. End Department of Defense 1033 Program*
- 4. Invest an additional \$305 billion for public education*

*The lives of young, Black and brown people depend on this, now.*

**Re: Invest in Public Education and Defund Police in Schools**

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

For more than three decades, Black and brown young people, parents, educators, and communities have organized to dismantle the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline. As a core feature of that fight, Black young people have relentlessly called to remove police from schools. Their experiences have made clear that police do not keep them safe.

The ongoing national uprising following the police murder of George Floyd, and many other Black people before him, have laid bare the horrific police violence Black people face across this country every day. As young people navigate two worlds - their communities and their schools - they know that the police who are harassing and brutalizing them in the streets are the same as the ones doing that in their schools.

The only way to end this perpetual cycle of police violence is to defund police, in communities and in schools, and instead invest in Black communities in ways that respect their human dignity. With this context in mind, as the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions prepares to hold its second hearing "COVID-19: Going back to school safely," on June 10, 2020, there are critical issues about "safety" that simply cannot be ignored.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has created a health and economic crisis of epic proportions, for young people of color, and Black youth in particular, attending school with constant police presence has been an on-going crisis they have had to face, daily. The school-to-prison pipeline is one of the most egregious examples of systemic racism and state sanctioned violence.

Thus, any plans for the safe reopening of schools must focus on dealing both with the health and economic impacts of COVID-19, and the scourge of police brutality, police violence and the criminalization of Black, brown youth and youth with disabilities at schools.

When schools reopen they must be police-free and there must be deep investment in their health and well-being and in their educational success.

Congress has a critical role in ensuring young people's vision to have schools without police and with the support and resources they need. **Congress must defund all federal funds from school police and criminalizing infrastructure in schools and invest at least \$305 Billion in the next federal coronavirus stimulus funding.**

**The call to defund school police and for police free schools is echoing across the country now, but this is not a new demand:**

Last year, young people for across the country released a political Youth Mandate - which was developed by the youth organizers and youth leaders at **Center for Popular Democracy Action** and the **Alliance for Educational Justice** -which outlines transformative, anti-racist policies to guide the nation towards building supportive and inclusive learning environments for all students and families, and seeks to redress the harm created by policies that criminalize youth of color. The Youth Mandate has been endorsed by 130 youth-led organizations and allies across the country.

Among its key demands, the Youth Mandate calls for divesting from school police and criminalizing infrastructure in schools, strengthening students' civil rights, and ending the private takeover of the public school system. It also calls for much deeper investment in public education and the Sustainable Community Schools model.

The time is now to act on the vision set forth by Black and Brown young people across the country.

**The Youth Mandate demands the following:**

**1. Divest all federal funds from school police and criminalizing infrastructure in schools.**

The federal government has invested more than \$1 billion in the criminalization of young people, primarily students of color, in schools. It must act now to defund those programs and reinvest that money in public education.

- **End the COPS program created through the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 ('94 Crime Bill) and eliminate funding (\$300 million) for it in the HEROES Act.** All federal funding towards criminalizing students must be divested. There is no substantial evidence that school-based police create a safe school environment, but there is

undeniable evidence it leads to an increase in children being funneled into the criminal legal system. Since its establishment under Title I of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) has given approximately \$1 billion in federal grants to state and local governments for school-based programs. The majority of these grants were dedicated to funding the hiring and training of school resource officers by local law enforcement offices. This is the largest source of direct federal dollars to police schools. The COPS office played a leading role in the explosion of police in schools, and continues today to encourage criminalizing students through the School Violence Prevention Program (SVPP). ***The HEROES Act attempts to funnel an additional \$300 million towards the COPS office, despite nationwide uprisings calling to defund police and massive budgetary needs for education and health. Just days ago, the COPS Office announced a suite of 596 new grants to increase policing, including to at least two school districts.*** Recent research directly linked the COPS grant program, COPS in Schools, to decreased graduation rates: “exposure to a three-year federal grant for school police **decreases** high school graduation rates by approximately 2.5 percent and college enrollment rates by 4 percent.” The prevalence of school-based police has little to do with “crime” and much more to do with how many Black students attend the school. **Congress must act now to end the COPS program, eliminate the additional \$300 million allocated towards it in the HEROES Act, and redirect its funds towards K-12 education needs.**

- **End all federal funding for police in schools.** While the most prominent, the COPS office is not the only source of federal funds that criminalizes students. There are also programs within the Bureau of Justice Administration and other federal offices which funnel federal dollars to ineffective and criminalizing grant programs. All federal programs that fund school police, security personnel, and criminalizing school infrastructure must be ended.
- **End the Department of Defense 1033 program.** The Department of Defense (DOD) 1033 Program allows for the transfer of DOD property to local law enforcement to assist in “their arrest and apprehension mission.” At least 17 school districts have been given military equipment through this program, which has actively militarized school-based police. In some instances, school districts have been armed with M-16 rifles, shotguns, rifles, Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles and grenade launchers. Military weapons have no place in our schools or communities. The 1033 program must be immediately ended. School districts that have been harmed by receiving military grade equipment from the federal government should be prioritized to receive grant funding to increase social, emotional, and mental health initiatives.

## 2. **Invest \$305 Billion in Public K-12 Education**

The true cost of this pandemic has yet to be seen. We know, however, that the economic impact on education systems across the country will be staggering. Current estimates by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities on state revenue shortfalls and new education expenses associated with the pandemic, results in a need of \$305 billion.

The federal government cannot not waste money on failed, abusive, and racist strategies of policing and controlling young people. Instead it must invest in the support and resources that truly make our schools and communities healthy and safe - teachers, quality schools, nurses, supplies, and food.

- **Congress must include \$305 billion in K-12 public education stabilization funding as you negotiate coronavirus response legislation.**

We support Rep. Talib and Rep. Hayes calls for this funding. The letter has been endorsed by more than 100 House Representatives. As they stated in their letter to Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader Schumer:

“We urge you to prioritize our students, educators and school districts, and ensure they are not left behind as you negotiate the next relief package...Without federal support, the fallout from state budgets will have drastic consequences for education, particularly students’ access to teachers. A 25% reduction in state education funding will result in the elimination of more than 580,000 education positions. This is more than 15% of the nation’s educator workforce....The projected cuts to public education spending due to our current crisis are two and half times worse than the Great Recession’s impact on our public education....Therefore, we urge that as you negotiate coronavirus response legislation, you allocate at least \$305 billion to a State Fiscal Stabilization Fund for grants to States to support statewide and local funding specifically for our K-12 public schools. Our children’s education is too important to risk.”

### 3. **Congress must prevent the further privatization of public education:**

As Congress debates the need to invest in K-12 public schools it must guard against those funds being directed towards this Administrations’ privatization agenda. Congress should prohibit this funding from being directed towards charter schools or voucher programs. The money previously invested in these privately run institutions, should instead be invested to strengthen traditional public schools and in particular to fund the expansion of sustainable community schools instead.

### **The people are rising up with clear demands: Which side are you on?**

From Minneapolis, to New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Georgia, Atlanta, Washington, DC, Wisconsin, Michigan, and in hundreds of other communities in states across the country, people are rising up to defend Black lives and to demand the defunding of police, including loud echoes of calls for police-free schools. Now, more than ever, it is clear that we need our government to invest in our communities and in our education. As this committee considers the urgent question of how this country can safely reopen schools it must act with the moral clarity demanded by this moment.

This committee must call for defunding of all federal funds directed towards school policing infrastructure that criminalizes Black and Brown youth in our schools, and instead invest \$305 billion for the stabilization of K-12 education public education.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Epps-Addison  
Network President and co-Executive Director  
The Center for Popular Democracy

