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April 5, 2018

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
260 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of SPARC, a coalition including more than 200 academic and research libraries spanning nearly every state, I write to express thanks for including funding in the FY18 omnibus package for an open textbook grants, and to request your support for a \$10 million appropriation for open textbook grants in FY19 within the \$2 billion committed to “student-centered programs that aid college completion and affordability.” By supporting the creation and use of open textbooks now, Congress has the opportunity to save students millions of dollars in college costs and reduce student debt for many years to come while also improving teaching and learning outcomes in the classroom.

Textbook costs are a critical and often overlooked financial barrier for college students. College textbook prices have risen 88% over the last decade, even in spite of alternative options such as used books and renting.<sup>1</sup> Many students report having to forgo buying a textbook for a course because it is simply too expensive, or take on additional debt to afford their books. Now that so much information is available in digital form, there is an opportunity to expand the creation and use of open textbooks: high-quality, freely available textbooks that can be downloaded, edited and shared to better serve all students. In addition to being freely available to students, these resources carry an open license allowing professors to tailor textbooks to better suit their courses and local contexts. Studies have shown that students do as well or better in open textbook courses than students in courses using a commercial textbook.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics:

<https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2016/college-tuition-and-fees-increase-63-percent-since-january-2006.htm>

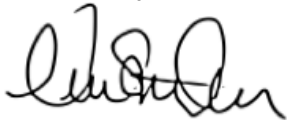
<sup>2</sup> Fischer, L., Hilton, J., Robinson T. J., & Wiley, D. (2015). “A Multi-institutional Study of the Impact of Open Textbook Adoption on the Learning Outcomes of Post-secondary Students.” *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*. <http://openedgroup.org/review>

Libraries are on the front lines of helping students find affordable textbooks, and also in assisting faculty as they choose and create appropriate and affordable materials for their courses. Because libraries are tasked with providing the best and most up-to-date information for students and faculty to do their work, libraries understand the fundamental power of open textbooks to help make higher education affordable and attainable.

Case studies at the state and institutional level have shown that open textbook grant programs save students many times the amount invested in terms of textbook costs, such as programs in Georgia, North Dakota, and Washington that have saved students ten dollars or more for every dollar spent. While many institutions have taken steps to support open textbooks as the most effective alternative to expensive course materials, it takes time and resources to develop quality, sustainable open learning materials and to support their broader use in courses. Federal grants supporting the creation and use of open textbooks at colleges and universities would accelerate this transition and have an immediate impact on students' pocketbooks.

In closing, we are thankful for the \$5 million included in the FY18 omnibus package for an open textbook grant program and are excited to see the impact these grants will make. As you consider how to best allocate the additional \$2 billion in FY19 for "student-centered programs that aid college completion and affordability," we ask that you direct \$10 million of this funding to support open textbook grants to colleges and universities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole Allen", written in a cursive style.

Nicole Allen  
Director of Open Education

cc: Members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies