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April 22, 2021

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

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

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

On behalf of SPARC, a coalition of more than 200 academic and research libraries working to make open the default in research and education, thank you for your continued support for the Open Textbook Pilot grant program at the Department of Education. Your investment of \$7 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 brings the total funding for the Pilot to \$24 million since FY 2018, and the first seven funded projects are already on track to save students more than \$80 million through the creation and use of high-quality open textbooks.

We respectfully urge you to build on this investment by providing at least \$25 million for the Open Textbook Pilot in FY 2022.

The cost of college textbooks is a significant but often overlooked barrier to achieving equity in higher education. Over the last two decades, the cost of textbooks has risen 151%, far outpacing inflation.¹ Recent studies say that the majority of students have skipped buying one or more of their required textbooks due to cost, risking harm to their grades.² The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges for many students, especially those struggling with food insecurity or limited internet access.³ It is not enough for the textbook model to "return to normal" after the pandemic; it can and must be better for students.

The Open Textbook Pilot provides grants for the creation and use of open textbooks at higher education institutions in order to achieve student savings and improve student learning

¹ <https://www.aei.org/carpe-diem/chart-of-the-day-or-century-5/>

² <https://dlss.flvc.org/colleges-and-universities/research/textbooks>

³ <https://studentpargs.org/2021/02/24/fixing-the-broken-textbook-market-third-edition/>

outcomes. Open textbooks are high-quality educational resources that are freely available to download, edit, and share to better serve all students. In addition to being free of cost in digital form, these resources carry an open copyright license allowing unrestricted, barrier free sharing and adaptation. This flexibility makes it substantially easier to create print copies at a low cost, make adaptations for students with disabilities, and allow students to retain the material for future studies.

Using open textbooks in place of traditional textbooks substantially reduces costs and expands access, with an average of more than \$100 saved per student per course.⁴ Multiple peer-reviewed academic studies have also found that using open textbooks can lead to improved student outcomes, including for students who are traditionally underserved by higher education.⁵ As COVID-19 continues to amplify the structural inequities that exist in higher education, open textbooks offer critical savings, versatility, and a level playing field that can help more students succeed.

We therefore urge Congress to increase funding for the Open Textbook Pilot to at least \$25 million in FY 2022. This program has drawn substantially more applications than available funds in both of its competitions to date, and its grantees have established a strong track record for success. The projected \$80 million in student savings from the seven projects funded since FY 2018 represents a return on investment of more than four-to-one—a number that will only grow over time. An additional investment of \$25 million could save students \$100 million or more, helping to lower financial barriers to higher education for more Americans.

Students, libraries, and education advocates across the country are thankful for your support for the Open Textbook Pilot over the past four fiscal years. Thank you for considering our request to build on the program's success with at least \$25 million in FY 2022.

Sincerely,



Nicole Starr Allen
Director of Open Education

⁴ <https://studentpirgs.org/sites/student/files/reports/The%20Billion%20Dollar%20Solution.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/pdf/IJTLHE3386.pdf>