SPARC∗

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May 17, 2024

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

On behalf of SPARC, a coalition of more than 250 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) 2024 brings the total funding for the Pilot to $54 million since FY 2018, and its funded projects are already on track to save students more than $250 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 2025.

The cost of college textbooks is a significant but often overlooked barrier to higher education. Between 1977 and 2015, the cost of textbooks increased by over 1000%, 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 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 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,

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[1] https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college-textbooks
[2] https://dlss.flvc.org/colleges-and-universities/research/textbooks

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.[3] Multiple peer-reviewed studies have found that using open textbooks can lead to improved student outcomes, including for students who are traditionally underserved by higher education.[4] 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 2025. This program has drawn substantially more applications than available funds in its competitions to date, and its grantees have established a strong track record for success.[5] The projected $250 million in student savings from the 24 projects funded since FY 2018 represents a substantial return on investment. An additional $25 million in Pilot funds 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 six fiscal years. Thank you for considering our request to build on the program's success with at least $25 million in FY 2025.

Sincerely,

Nicole Starr Allen
Director of Open Education

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[3] https://studentpirgs.org/2015/02/24/open-textbooks-billion-dollar-solution/
[4] http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/pdf/IJTLHE3386.pdf
[5] https://www2.ed.gov/programs/otp/awards.html