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DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2027

HEARINGS

BEFORE A

SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES

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DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2027

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2026.

THE SCIENCE OF READING

WITNESSES

DR. HOLLY LANE, DIRECTOR & PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA LITERACY INSTITUTE
BONNIE SHORT, DIRECTOR, ALABAMA READING INITIATIVE
LARRY SAULSBERRY, JR., DIRECTOR, TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR LITERACY, HUNTSVILLE CITY SCHOOLS

Mr. ADERHOLT. Good morning. The subcommittee will come to order, and it is my pleasure to convene our first hearing for the year on the critical issue of childhood literacy. As we all know, developing strong reading skills at an early age is a foundational building block for lifelong success.

When students master basic reading skills by the fourth grade, they make the important transition from learning to read to reading to learn. That is why these early years are so critical and why we owe it to our children to provide them with proven, effective instruction in reading.

To that end, I hope today's hearing will highlight the tremendous work of State and local leaders to advance what has become known as the Science of Reading.

I also want to thank my colleague from California, Mr. Harder, for his championing this issue and building awareness around today's topic, so thank you, Mr. Harder, for your support and encouragement in that point.

Also, Congressman Dale Strong from Alabama, my colleague, while he is not on the subcommittee, he has been a champion of this issue, and I appreciate his input as well on it.

The Science of Reading is a research-based approach to literacy instruction that places a strong emphasis on phonics. States have adopted Science of Reading strategies—that have implemented comprehensive literacy plans featuring high-quality coursework and rigorous teacher training. These States are achieving remarkable success for their students.

From 2013 to 2024, Mississippi, for example, rose from 49th to 9th in the Nation in fourth grade reading scores and is now tied for the third highest reading proficiency rate among underprivileged students. While many refer to this achievement as the "Mis-

sissippi miracle," others have more accurately called it the "Mississippi marathon," reflecting the sustained effort and perseverance required to produce such a result.

Other States adopting Science of Reading strategies have experienced similar gains. Louisiana, for example, improved from last to 16th in the Nation in fourth grade reading between 2019 and 2024. Tennessee moved from 31st to 23rd, and I am also proud to report that my home State of Alabama advanced from 49th to 34th during the same period. We still have a long way to go, but this progress is an important step in the right direction.

Let me just note that Alabama is one of only two States, along with Louisiana, to exceed pre-COVID levels in fourth grade reading achievement.

Much of this progress has been achieved with fewer financial resources per pupil than are available in many other States, which demonstrates that increased spending alone is not always the answer. The key is the wise and prudent use of resources directed toward proven teaching methods and a strong focus on the fundamentals.

This record of success also underscores the importance of a bottom-up approach to education reform rather than a top-down mandate from Washington. States are rightly leading the way as laboratories of innovation and improvements in our education system.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel today as they talk about the Science of Reading and the promise it holds to improve literacy outcomes for our Nation's young students.

I would like to ask for unanimous consent to enter a statement that Mr. Guest of Mississippi would like to put into the record.

[The information follows:]

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BORDER SECURITY AND ENFORCEMENT
SUBCOMMITTEE
CHAIRMAN

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

February 10, 2026

Congressman Guest's Statement Before the Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee

To Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, my colleagues on the Labor-HHS subcommittee, and to our distinguished witnesses: thank you for your efforts in putting together this hearing and providing a forum to discuss effective education policies that have already delivered strong results for so many students across our nation.

I am honored to serve as the United States Representative from the Third Congressional District of Mississippi, a state that has dominated news headlines and policy discussions around the country for its rapid advancements in student academic performance. Since 2013, these advancements, known as the "Mississippi Miracle," demonstrate the hard work of Mississippi educators and the fruit of investing in our students.

According to the 2024 report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Mississippi's rankings include:

- #1 in the country for both reading and math gains,
- #9 in the nation for 4th grade reading scores, including:
    - #1 for economically disadvantaged students,
    - #1 for Hispanic students, and
    - #3 for African American students.

It is my sincerest hope that other states will follow Mississippi's lead and enact bold, evidence-based policies that better meet the needs of students and secure the brightest possible future for America's children. I look forward to further discussion on this important topic.

Sincerely,

Michael Guest
Member of Congress

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Before we turn to our witnesses, I next want to recognize our distinguished ranking chairwoman, Ms. DeLauro, and ask for any opening remarks that she would like to make.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

As you were talking about the Mississippi experience, our governor, Governor Lamont, when he did his State of the State address just a few days ago, had introduced literacy coaches. Lamont's proposed budget revisions for education includes $4.5 million in funding to create a "statewide network of literacy coaches to counteract a drop in reading scores."

Based on the successful program initially launched in Mississippi, the coaches would go to certain kindergarten through third grade classrooms, work with existing school staff. The lesson plan, model, and demo lessons implement universal screening programs, et cetera, and create action plans according to the budget proposal.

The Mississippi model is really gaining traction around the country, and I am so proud of my State and my governor for adopting this effort.

I say good morning to everyone, and thank you so much for being here. A big thank you to our witnesses. I am so glad that you could be with us today to share your knowledge and insight with this committee.

Chairman Aderholt, I think this is an important committee, and thank you for convening it.

I also want to commend my colleague, Congressman Harder, for his advocacy and support for a matter that is important to all of us and before us today, the Science of Reading.

Teaching our children to read and to love reading is one of the foundational responsibilities of our Nation's education system. We are all sitting here, all of us, who have either read to our kids, our grandkids, et cetera, because it is what you do in order to be able to help to educate them and to get them to have an appreciation of reading and to love it.

It is also wonderful when you try to skip over the passages and they tell you, well, you missed this, you know. That just happened in our house. You missed this piece or you missed that piece, because they know the material.

It is clear that there are serious shortcomings when it comes to reading achievement nationwide. In her testimony, Dr. Lane will highlight the value of our Federal investments in education research and high-quality teacher preparation programs. Many of these programs were slated to be eliminated, but through bipartisan negotiations, we were able to craft a Labor–Health and Human Services (HHS)–Education bill that maintains and, in many instances, increases funding for this crucial work.

Dr. Lane will also share that only 31 percent of fourth graders and 30 percent of eighth graders reached proficient levels of reading on the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress. In other words, more than two-thirds of children in the United States are not reading proficiently.

That is unacceptable, which is why it is so important that we are holding this hearing today on the Science of Reading. In fact, this subcommittee is responsible for the creation of the 2000 National

Reading Panel Report, a landmark document that went on to reflect the scientific consensus regarding effective reading instruction, a legacy that endures to this day.

The 1998 Labor–HHS–Education bill under Chairman John Porter, who not only understood the value of research and education but was instrumental in substantially increasing investments at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) as well, directed the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Secretary of Education to "convene a national panel to assess the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read."

Our subcommittee tasked this panel with publishing its conclusion along with a strategy for disseminating its findings to "facilitate effective reading instruction in our schools." This report, mandated by an appropriations law, marked the beginning of a data-driven, evidence-based consensus on what it takes to mold proficient readers.

It laid out five pillars of this science, which include: Phonemic awareness, the ability to identify and play with individual sounds and spoken words; phonics, reading instruction focused on understanding how letters and groups of letters link to sounds to form letter-sound relationships and spelling patterns; fluency, the ability to read words, phrases, sentences, and stories correctly with enough speed and expression; vocabulary, knowing what words mean and how to say and use them correctly; comprehension, the ability to understand what you are reading.

In a moment, you will hear from Dr. Holly Lane, a director of the University of Florida Literacy Institute, who will share the critical challenges we face nationwide in translating our theoretical understanding of effective reading instruction into practice.

We will also hear from Ms. Bonnie Short, the director of the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), and Mr. Larry Saulsberry, the director of Teaching and Learning for Literacy for Huntsville City Schools (HCS), who will share their insights into applying these principles on the State and local levels.

I am sincerely looking forward to this hearing because I believe the Appropriations Committee has a central role to play in helping our Nation's teachers and our schools apply the science of reading so that every child not only has a chance to succeed but to experience the intellectual, emotional, and cultural exploration that reading makes possible.

I look forward to working with you to build on the NICHD report and the Department of Education's 2000 National Reading Panel Report and support Federal investments in education programs designed to help educators effectively teach the Science of Reading.

This starts with our important investments in education, research, and technical assistance, such as comprehensive centers, regional education laboratories, and the Institute of Education Sciences grants. It continues with our investments in teacher preparation and training, such as teacher quality partnerships, Title II–A, and it must include our robust support for Title I, English language acquisition and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), so that children from all backgrounds have the skills they need to succeed.

Finally, I believe this committee has the responsibility to make sure that the United States has an effective Federal Department of Education that works with grant recipients in States and districts nationwide so that Federal dollars are used effectively to drive literacy gains through the Science of Reading. The Department of Education is critical to increasing literacy and reading, and I believe we should be dedicating even more resources to this vital mission.

I thank you and I yield back, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, Ms. DeLauro.

At this point, we will start our testimony hearing from our witnesses. Again, we have three witnesses here today: Bonnie Short, director of Alabama Reading Initiative. We have Larry Saulsberry, the director of Teaching and Learning for Literacy for Huntsville City Schools; and Holly Lane, director of the University of Florida Literacy Institute, and professor.

With that, Dr. Lane, we will begin with you and look forward to your testimony.

Ms. LANE. Thank you so much.

Good morning, Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro and members of the subcommittee. It is an honor to be here to speak with you about the science of reading, something clearly near and dear to my heart, and as an academic, limiting my comments to five minutes will be a special challenge.

My name is Holly Lane, and I am a professor of education at the University of Florida, and I am the director of the University of Florida Literacy Institute, better known as UFLI.

Most people would agree that learning to read is a child's most important accomplishment in the elementary grades. Reading proficiency in the early grades is closely linked to later academic, social, and economic outcomes. It is what makes productive citizens.

The term "science of reading" means different things to different people, so allow me to explain what I mean when I use that term. The Science of Reading is the vast accumulated body of evidence about what reading is, how people learn to do it, and how it is most effectively taught. The evidence comes from numerous fields of study, including education research, psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience.

One of the more useful frameworks for understanding reading is called the "Simple View of Reading," and it was first proposed four decades ago by Gough and Tunmer. The Simple View does not suggest that reading is a simple process. In fact, it is just a simple way of understanding a very complex process.

The Simple View can be stated in a single sentence, that reading comprehension is the product of word recognition and linguistic comprehension. That is, in order to read and comprehend text, one must be able to read the words on the page and understand the spoken language that is used in the text. It does sound simple, but a lot goes into both of these areas.

What is the problem? We know that reading achievement is a big problem in this country. Why are we seeing such poor reading outcomes? These are complex questions, but I will attempt to address some of what I see as the core problems we face.

The first problem is the expertise of educators. Although, there are many, many excellent reading teachers out there, many others enter the classroom ill-prepared to teach reading either because their teacher preparation programs taught them outdated and ineffective methods or because they received no teacher preparation at all—many alternatively certified teachers are teaching kids how to read—or their ongoing professional learning about reading is focused on the latest fads rather than on the latest evidence.

A closely related problem is the lack of reading expertise among education leaders. Few school or district leaders have deep knowledge about reading, which means reading instruction seldom gets the attention or support that it deserves.

Another key problem is the quality of the tools provided to teachers. Few published reading programs have any systematic rigorous evaluation before they are sold to schools. Many programs are marketed as being aligned with the Science of Reading, but there are no safeguards in place to ensure that this is true.

There is no equivalent of the Food and Drug Administration to evaluate reading programs to ensure that they are effective or at least to ensure that they are not harmful. This leaves schools and districts susceptible to every snake oil salesman that comes along, and there are many.

Most State approval processes tend to ignore efficacy data altogether while focusing instead on superficial elements that have little impact on student achievement. Also, the approval processes almost never consider program usability in any substantive way. Even when a program does have data demonstrating efficacy under controlled study conditions, it may not be effective in real classrooms.

Programs are bloated with useless activities that do nothing to promote learning, and few programs these days have children actually reading real books or tackling content of substance. I have heard it said that most reading programs today are designed to be successful in the curriculum adoption process, not in the classroom. I concur with that statement.

We must ensure that the tools provided to educators are effective, and educators in the field need guidance and protection from snake oil salesmen. We need safeguards in place.

Most of the problems in reading today are related to these two main issues: Leader expertise—teacher-leader expertise, and the quality of their tools. If we want to improve reading outcomes, we need to address both of these.

There are certainly bright spots in the reading world: schools, districts, and States that have beaten the odds and made remarkable gains in reading, some of them represented right here with me. Their efforts have focused largely on these two issues.

We need to learn from these examples and replicate their efforts to ensure reading success for all children. We need to follow the science we have, and we need to continue to add to the science through ongoing rigorous research efforts.

Thank you.

[The information follows:]



Holly B. Lane, Ph.D.
Professor, University of Florida
Director, UF Literacy Institute
February 10, 2026

Thank you to Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro for the opportunity to speak before this Subcommittee. My name is Holly Lane, and I am a professor of education at the University of Florida and the director of the UF Literacy Institute, better known as UFLI[1]. I am also the lead author of *UFLI Foundations*, a very widely used phonics program. I am honored to speak with you all about the science of reading.

As I am sure you know, learning to read is a child's most important accomplishment in elementary school. Reading proficiency is linked to academic, social, and economic outcomes[2]. Unfortunately, children who do not learn to read well during the primary grades typically struggle in reading throughout school[3]. Poor reading achievement has long been a national concern. In fact, only 31% of fourth graders and 30% of eighth graders reached proficient levels of reading on the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress[4]. This means that more than two-thirds of children in the United States are *not* reading proficiently.

Unfortunately, once poor reading trajectories are established, they are very difficult to change[5], and early gaps tend to widen over time[6]. The long-term effects of reading difficulties can be devastating. Reading failure often leads to grade retention, dropout, and limited employment opportunities[7]. Identifying effective methods for early reading instruction and intervention for struggling students is critical.

This is where the science of reading comes in. The term "science of reading" means different things to different people, so allow me to explain what I mean when I use the term. The science of reading is the accumulated body of evidence from various fields of study that helps us understand what reading is, how people learn to do it, and how it is most effectively taught.

Research from neuroscience has helped us understand how the brain learns to read. Linguists have uncovered which aspects of language need to be developed for proficient reading. Research from cognitive and developmental psychology has shed light on how learning happens and the conditions that promote it, while education research has identified effective instructional methods and ways to support program implementation. Together, the contributions of evidence from these fields and others constitute what has become known as the science of reading.

One of the theoretical frameworks that has been particularly important to the science of reading is the "simple view of reading" (SVR)[8]. To be clear, the SVR does not suggest that reading is a simple process. It is a simple way of understanding a very complex process. In short, the SVR posits that reading comprehension is the product of word recognition and linguistic comprehension. That is, in order to read and comprehend text, one must be able to read the words on the page, *and* one must be able to understand the language used in the text. It sounds simple, but both parts of this equation have many components. Word recognition skills include the capacity to attend to individual sounds in words, the understanding that letters and letter combinations are written representations of those sounds, the ability to decode and encode words, and the automaticity with these skills to perform them without conscious effort. Language skills include knowledge of word meanings, understanding of how words work together in sentences, and background knowledge of the world so the reader can connect new knowledge to it. Word recognition skills and language proficiency must be fully developed to optimize reading comprehension. Although the SVR does not encompass every aspect of reading, numerous studies have demonstrated that this theory accounts for most of the variance in reading proficiency[9].

We know how important reading is, we have this definition of the science of reading, and we have a strong theoretical understanding of how reading develops and how it can be effectively taught. So, what is the problem? Why are we seeing such poor reading outcomes?

These are complex questions, but I will attempt to address some of what I see as the core problems we face.

The first problem is teacher preparation. Many, many teachers enter the classroom ill-prepared to teach reading. This may be because their teacher preparation program taught them outdated and ineffective methods[10]. It may also be that they entered the field without attending a teacher preparation program at all. Or, finally, it may be because their ongoing professional learning about reading has focused on the latest fads rather than on evidence-based practices. With few standard expectations for what a reading teacher needs to know and be able to do, we run the risk of having schools full of teachers with widely varying knowledge and skills, who have differing understandings of key concepts and no real shared language.

A related problem is the lack of reading expertise among education leaders[11]. School leaders are expected to be experts in all areas of instruction—not just reading. At the same time, they need to be experts in school finance, personnel management, transportation, behavior management, and communication, among many other things. No one can be expected to have this many areas of expertise, so each leader tends to prioritize the areas they know well. When they lack deep knowledge about reading, which is often the case and typically results in other issues taking priority over reading in their schools.

Another key problem is the quality of the tools provided to teachers. Few reading programs have any systematic, rigorous evaluation before they are sold to schools. Of those that have been studied, there are many with poor student outcomes. Many programs are marketed as being "aligned with the science of reading," but there are no safeguards in place to ensure that they actually are. There is no equivalent of the Food and Drug Administration to evaluate reading programs to ensure that they are effective, or at least to ensure that they are not harmful. This leaves schools and districts susceptible to every snake oil salesman that comes along with the

newest shiny thing[12]. The processes used by states and districts to vet programs for approval tend to ignore efficacy data–or the lack thereof. The processes are more likely to focus on superficial elements that have little impact on student achievement. Also, approval processes almost never consider program usability in any substantive way. So, even when a program does have data demonstrating efficacy under controlled study conditions, it may not be effective in real classrooms.

Ultimately, most of the problems with reading today are related to these two issues: teacher and leader expertise and the quality of their instructional tools. I imagine that at least one reason for my invitation to speak to this Subcommittee is that I have led a successful effort to address these problems. Our work at UFLI initially focused on using the science of reading to develop high quality reading teacher preparation. We considered what knowledge and skills teachers needed to teach all children[13]. We developed and tested methods for preparing teachers to teach reading and to provide intervention for students who struggle to learn to read. Later, we supported other teacher educators as they adopted these practices[14].

More recently, my team and I used the science of reading to develop a phonics program that is both effective and user-friendly for teachers. *UFLI Foundations* started at one school in north Florida, and after seeing remarkable results in that school, we tested it in a district-wide pilot study. The district-wide results were even more remarkable[15]. Only after these two years of piloting did we publish the program for use elsewhere. Since its release in 2022, the program has been adopted in more than 600,000 classrooms in at least 110 countries. We see tremendous gains wherever *UFLI Foundations* is implemented as designed. It is important to note that the program was built upon a long legacy of rigorous research. We relied on the science of reading, and it worked. Most of the research was funded by the Department of Education, the National

Institutes of Health, and the National Science Foundation, so thank you for this support of reading research.

To improve reading instruction and, ultimately, student reading outcomes, we must improve both educator preparation and instructional materials. We must ensure that teachers and leaders get high quality preparation in reading. A relatively new organization called the Evidence Advocacy Center (EAC) has taken up this mission[16]. The EAC's founder, Dr. Douglas Carnine, said, "Professions grounded in evidence don't revert to disproven practices. Education does. It lurches on a pendulum, swinging back and forth between approaches already tested and found wanting."[17] He identified five pillars that evidence-based professions are built upon: a shared knowledge base, research-aligned preparation, licensure requirements focused on competence, meaningful accreditation processes, and accountability for adherence to evidence in practice. We must also ensure that the tools provided to educators are effective. Educators in the field need guidance and protection from snake oil salesmen. My understanding is that the Institute of Education Sciences' What Works Clearinghouse[18] was created to serve in this role, but it has fallen short. It is an excellent resource, but it is difficult for practitioners to use, and its limited funding has not allowed it to be comprehensive enough or to keep up with the field. Other resources have attempted to fill this gap but have also fallen short.

There are certainly bright spots in the reading world–schools, districts, and states that have beaten the odds and made remarkable gains in reading. Their efforts have focused largely on the two issues I have discussed: developing educator expertise and implementing high-quality instructional tools. We need to learn from these examples and replicate their efforts to ensure reading success for all children. We need to follow the science we have, and we need to continue to add to the science through ongoing, rigorous research efforts.

[1] https://ufli.education.ufl.edu/
[2] https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/moats.pdf
[3] Lesnick, J., Goerge, R., Smithgall, C., & Gwynne, J. (2010). *Reading on grade level in third grade: How is it related to high school performance and college enrollment*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 1, 12.
[4] https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/
[5] Good, R. H., Baker, S. K., & Peyton, J. A. (2009). Making sense of nonsense word fluency: Determining adequate progress in early first-grade reading. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 25*(1), 33-56.
[6] Singh, M., Dunn, H., & Amor, H. B. H. (2022). Reading Trajectories in Elementary Grades: A Longitudinal Analysis. *International Journal of Educational Methodology, 8*(2), 259-273.
[7] Sabatini, J. (2015). *Understanding the basic reading skills of U. S adults: Reading components in the PIAAC Literacy Survey*. Princeton, NJ: ETS Center for Research on Human Capital and Education.
[8] Hoover, W. A., & Tunmer, W. E. (2018). The simple view of reading: Three assessments of its adequacy. *Remedial and Special Education, 39*(5), 304-312.
[9] Lonigan, C. J., Burgess, S. R., & Schatschneider, C. (2018). Examining the simple view of reading with elementary school children: Still simple after all these years. *Remedial and Special Education, 39*(5), 260-273.
[10] https://www.nctq.org/research-insights/teacher-prep-review-strengthening-elementary-reading-instruction/
[11] Mortensen, D. (2022). Five action steps for school and district leaders implementing the science of reading. *The Reading League Journal, 3*(2), 23, 28.
[12] https://ufli.education.ufl.edu/science-or-snake-oil/
[13] https://app.box.com/s/21gdk2k1p3bnagdfz1xv0v98j5vtl1wk
[14] https://aacte.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/AACTE-Science-of-reading-report-Valentina-Contesse-Holly-Lane-022023.pdf, https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/K-5-Reading-IC.pdf
[15] https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.607
[16] https://evidenceadvocacycenter.org/
[17] https://thenext30years.substack.com/p/stopping-the-pendulum-making-education?utm_source=share&utm_medium=android&r=18plrf&triedRedirect=true
[18] https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc

Mr. ADERHOLT. Okay. Thank you.

All right. Ms. Short, I look forward to hearing from you.

Ms. SHORT. Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to share Alabama's experience strengthening literacy through evidence-based policy and sustained implementation.

My name is Bonnie Short, and I am the director of the Alabama Reading Initiative at the Alabama State Department of Education. The Alabama Reading Initiative is a statewide effort focused on ensuring all students develop the foundational skills needed to meet or exceed grade-level standards.

Alabama's experience shows meaningful literacy improvement does not come from isolated programs or short-term initiatives. Instead, it comes from coherent policy paired with long-term job-imbedded implementation supports that help educators deliver strong instruction, identify risk early, and respond quickly when students need additional support.

This work has been successful because literacy has been a shared priority of State leadership, including our State Superintendent Mackey, the legislature, and our governor, along with the commitment of local schools and educators.

In 2019, Alabama enacted the Alabama Literacy Act with a clear goal: reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade. The law prioritizes prevention through strong core instruction, early and frequent screening, and timely evidence-based interventions.

Independent policy analyses have described Alabama's approach as comprehensive, noting components were intentionally designed to function together as a coordinated system. Implementation at scale has been central to this work.

First, Alabama has focused on strengthening core literacy instruction in every classroom through explicit evidence-based practices that build foundational reading skills and connect them to language development and comprehension.

Second, we have invested in professional learning, not one time training but ongoing job-imbedded support that helps educators translate research into daily instructional practice.

Third, assessment is coherent and purposeful. Alabama provides universal screening and early literacy assessment resources to identify students at risk and monitor progress while emphasizing clear, family-facing communication so parents understand the results and what schools plan to do.

Fourth, when students require additional support, schools are equipped to respond quickly through tiered instruction and what we call student reading improvement plans aligned to the Alabama Literacy Act, which includes outside-of-the-school-day learning opportunities.

Finally, Alabama has prioritized student-centered coaching, grounding professional learning in student work and outcomes so it leads to measurable change in the classroom practice.

In addition to this implementation, Alabama has invested in long-term prevention by partnering with education preparation programs in our institutions of higher education to ensure teachers enter the classroom with a solid foundation and evidence-based

reading instruction. These efforts have produced measurable results.

Public reporting on the National Assessment of Education Progress shows Alabama's fourth grade reading performance moved from 49th in the Nation in 2019 to 34th in 2024.

Federal investments are most effective when they support the structures that make evidence-based practice durable at scale, professional learning and coaching capacity, early identification and intervention support, and family-facing data systems that protect instructional time.

Teaching children to read is both an educational imperative and sound public investment. Thank you for your commitment to improving literacy outcomes for the children in our Nation.

[The information follows:]

Testimony of Bonnie Short

Director, Alabama Reading Initiative

Alabama State Department of Education

Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on

Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education

February 10, 2026

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to share Alabama's experience strengthening early literacy through evidence-based policy and sustained implementation.

My name is Bonnie Short, and I serve as Director of the Alabama Reading Initiative at the Alabama State Department of Education. The Alabama Reading Initiative is a statewide effort focused on strengthening literacy instruction so that all students develop the foundational skills necessary to meet or exceed grade-level standards. Alabama's experience demonstrates that meaningful literacy improvement does not come from isolated programs or short-term initiatives. Instead, it results from coherent policy paired with long-term, job-embedded implementation supports that help educators deliver strong instruction, identify risk early, and respond quickly when students need additional support. It is successful with the combined commitment of the State Superintendent, Legislature, and a Governor who all make literacy a priority, as well as the support for and involvement of the local schools.

In 2019, Alabama enacted the Alabama Literacy Act to ensure that students read at or above grade level by the end of third grade. The law prioritizes prevention through strong core instruction, early and frequent screening, and timely, evidence-based intervention. Independent policy analyses have described Alabama's approach as comprehensive, noting that the state adopted a full set of early literacy policy components designed to function together as a coordinated system.

Implementation at scale has been central to this work. First, Alabama has focused on strengthening Tier 1 literacy instruction in every classroom. Through the Alabama Reading Initiative, schools receive support in delivering explicit, evidence-based instruction that builds foundational reading skills and connects them to language development and comprehension.

Second, Alabama has invested in building educator knowledge through sustained professional learning. Effective professional learning extends beyond one-time training and is reinforced through ongoing, job-embedded support that helps educators translate research into daily instructional practice.

Third, assessment is used coherently and purposefully. Alabama provides universal screening and early literacy assessment resources to help schools identify students at risk and monitor progress over time. Just as important, the state emphasizes clear, family-facing communication so that parents understand what assessment results mean and how schools will respond to student needs.

Fourth, when students require additional support, schools are equipped to respond quickly. The Alabama Reading Initiative provides guidance and tools aligned with the Literacy Act to support tiered instruction and the development of Student Reading Improvement Plans that are responsive to individual student needs.

Finally, Alabama has prioritized sustaining improvement through student-centered coaching. Coaching efforts focus on strengthening instruction by grounding professional conversations in student work and student outcomes, ensuring that professional learning leads to measurable changes in classroom practice.

In addition to K–12 implementation, Alabama has invested in long-term prevention by supporting partnerships with educator preparation programs and institutions of higher education. These partnerships help ensure that new teachers enter classrooms with a strong foundation in evidence-based reading instruction.

Teaching children to read is both an educational imperative and a sound public investment. Economic analyses of high-quality early childhood and early literacy efforts consistently show strong returns on investment. Alabama's early-grade outcomes reflect the value of pairing clear policy expectations with sustained implementation support. Public reporting on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has documented notable gains in Alabama's fourth-grade reading performance from 49th in the nation in 2019 and 34th in the nation in 2024 over time.

Based on Alabama's experience, federal partnership plays an essential role in sustaining effective literacy systems. Federal investments are most helpful when

they support the structures that make evidence-based practice durable at scale. These include sustained professional learning and coaching capacity, early identification and intervention supports that allow schools to respond quickly to student need, and family-facing data systems that reduce administrative burden while protecting instructional time.

Alabama's experience shows what is possible when literacy policy is paired with strong implementation: clear expectations, skilled educators, student-centered coaching, data-informed decision-making, and engaged families. Thank you for your commitment to improving literacy outcomes for students across the nation and for the opportunity to share Alabama's work. I would be honored to answer your questions.

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Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, Ms. Short.

Mr. Saulsberry, I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

Mr. SAULSBERRY. Thank you, Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee, for the opportunity to speak at today's hearing.

My name is Larry Saulsberry, Jr., and I currently serve as the director of Teaching and Learning for K–12 Literacy within Huntsville City Schools of Huntsville, Alabama.

In 2022, I enrolled in my first science reading course, Lexia Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) with a Principal's Primer. It was a one-year course that opened my eyes to what could be as I became more intentional in learning alongside teachers who were enrolled in LETRS for elementary educators and also leading all teachers in the process of teaching students how to read.

At that time, a financial incentive of $500, funded by my local education agency, Limestone County Schools, was allocated for course completers. In addition, I was leading a school that had been designated as Limited Support 2 by the Alabama Reading Initiative. Also, our school had been designated as an Additional Targeted and Support Improvement School under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

There is work that is happening across the State to close reading gaps by continuing the implementation of student reading improvement plans beyond grade three. However, in my current role, an important component of the work to advance literacy involves constantly assessing our programs and resources to determine if they lead to mastery of the content area standards and essential skills.

Oftentimes, students who grapple with phonological awareness will most likely have limited vocabulary and encounter challenges with grammar and language structures and semantics. How should schools and districts continually address this? One approach is through ensuring that teachers have increased awareness of the five pillars of literacy, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Another approach is by engaging teachers in coaching and professional development.

Furthermore, while growing up in Gee's Bend located in Wilcox County, Alabama, I learned the value of literacy. My parents and my deceased maternal grandmother, Deborah Pettway Young, a Gee's Bend quilter, ensured that I found enjoyment in reading. I now make it a goal to make certain that my three sons do as well.

During spring 2025, 88 percent of Alabama's third graders were reading on or above grade level as measured by the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program Summative Reading Subtest, which is required for third graders to be promoted. As I mentioned, we are working to close reading gaps by continuing the implementation of student reading improvement plans beyond grade three. Thus, funding support is needed to ensure access to high-quality instruction, resources, and interventionists for fourth and fifth graders.

In October 2025, I had the opportunity to attend the ninth annual conference of the Reading League. It was evident that the work of researchers like Dr. Anita Archer and Dr. Julie Washington is assuredly helping to change the landscape of teaching and

learning. That fundamental question remains of how to encourage all States to embrace the need for stronger science of reading policies. As Dr. Clarence Sutton, Jr., our superintendent, would say: "From vision to victory, every department, every school, every student."

Currently, in HCS, there is a strong partnership with The Schools Foundation in which teachers are invited to become Orton-Gillingham trained. In addition, the HCS dyslexia coordinator, along with a kindergarten teacher at Hampton Cove Elementary, recently became certified academic language therapists. Moreover, there are 26 local reading specialist positions funded by ARI and eight reading interventionist positions, which are also funded by ARI. In addition, HCS locally funds literacy specialists at several schools.

Furthermore, the partnership with Lexia remains strong as there are three cohorts of 63 participants enrolled in the LETRS for Administrators course.

Moreover, while teachers are also encouraged to enroll in LETRS for Elementary Educators and LETRS for Early Childhood Educators, a barrier has included the dissolution of the one-time $1,000 stipend, funding support for stipends, and substitute teacher costs, as needed.

In conclusion, one of the greatest gifts that we can give a student is the gift of reading, not just reading but proficient reading. With support to ensure access to professional development, personnel, and resources, there is hope that greater reading proficiency levels can and will be achieved.

Thank you again. Please share any questions that you may have.

[The information follows:]

Testimony Before the United States House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

"Supporting the Science of Reading"

February 10, 2026

Larry Saulsberry, Jr.,
Director of Teaching and Learning for K-12 Literacy, Huntsville City Schools

Thank you, Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee, for the opportunity to speak at today's hearing regarding the science of reading. My name is Larry Saulsberry, Jr., and I currently serve as the Director of Teaching and Learning for K-12 Literacy within Huntsville City Schools of Huntsville, Alabama.

Lived Experience

In 2022, I enrolled in my first science of reading course, Lexia Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) with a Principal's Primer. It was a one-year course that undoubtedly opened my eyes to the possibilities of what could be as I became more intentional in learning alongside teachers who were enrolled in LETRS for Elementary Educators and also leading all teachers under my leadership in the process of teaching students how to read. At that time, a financial incentive of five hundred dollars (funded by my local education agency, Limestone County Schools) was allocated for course completers of LETRS with a Principal's Primer. Upon engaging in the coursework, I reflected on the gaps in foundational reading skills among some of the students that I was leading and even some of my former students. In addition, I was leading a school that had been designated as Limited Support 2 (LS2) by the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) requiring quarterly one-on-one coaching sessions facilitated by the ARI Regional Literacy Leadership Specialists coupled with the "Strong Leaders, Strong Readers" quarterly sessions facilitated by ARI and the Office of School Improvement of the Alabama State

Department of Education (ALSDE). Through our collaboration, we identified and analyzed trends and achievement gaps in our data and determined better learning outcomes for students. Also, our school had been designated as an Additional Targeted and Support Improvement (ATSI) School under the Every Student Succeeds Act due to the performance of one of our subgroups. At that time, I became inspired to take a deeper dive into the vast range of available instructional/intervention resources within the platforms that we were utilizing as they had primarily been used to assess students for benchmark performance.

In my current role in HCS, an important component of the work to advance literacy involves constantly assessing our programs and resources to determine if they lead to mastery of the Alabama Course of Study content area standards and essential skills. Ultimately, it also involves measuring students' abilities and readiness for both language and reading comprehension as we apply the science of reading approach; for instance, it is a reality that oftentimes, students who grapple with phonological awareness will most likely have limited vocabulary and encounter challenges with grammar and language structures and semantics, etc. How should schools and districts continually address this? One approach is through ensuring that teachers have increased awareness of the five pillars of literacy, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Montgomery et al., 2013). Another approach is by engaging teachers in coaching (full and mini cycles) and professional development sessions implemented at minimum by the local reading specialists within their schools.

Furthermore, while growing up in the community of Gee's Bend located in Wilcox County, Alabama, I learned the value of literacy. My parents and my deceased maternal grandmother, Deborah Pettway Young (a Gee's Bend quilter), ensured that I found enjoyment in reading. I now make it a goal to make certain that my three sons do as well as two of them will

be preparing to meet the requirements of the Alabama Literacy Act soon. Undoubtedly, all students should be empowered to have an interest in reading.

A Look at the Data

During Spring 2025, 88% of Alabama's third graders were reading on or above grade level as measured by the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) Summative Reading Subtest, which is required by the ALSDE for third graders to be promoted to fourth grade. Only 32% (forty-eight) of Alabama's school districts (149 total) scored below the state average. However, what is being done about the 12% of third graders who were not reading on or above grade level? (Griesbach, 2025) There is work that is happening across the state to close reading gaps by continuing the implementation of Student Reading Improvement Plans (SRIPs) beyond grade three. For example, HCS serves nearly 24,000 students of which about 3,600 are fourth and fifth graders; several have SRIPs that have continued. Thus, funding support is needed to ensure access to high-quality instruction, resources, and interventionists for Alabama's fourth and fifth graders to experience increased reading proficiency before promotion to middle school.

Access to Professional Learning

Reflecting back to when I was an elementary principal, I recall one of my teachers seeking enrollment in Orton-Gillingham (OG) training. Unfortunately, I had not explored that method as a former English language arts teacher, former instructional coach, and not even as a school administrator. My wondering was that if this method had been successful in the early to mid-twentieth century, why would we have evolved from its application ("What is the Orton-Gillingham Approach?" n.d.). Simultaneously, that same teacher immediately shared how impactful the *Sold a Story* podcast had been in her approach to teaching reading, and upon listening to the episodes myself, I echoed her sentiments. The podcast challenged my thinking as

to how methods of teaching reading had evolved over the years to the present and further grounded the importance of the science of reading approach.

In October 2025, I had the opportunity to attend the 9th Annual Conference of the Reading League in Chicago, Illinois. It was evident that the work of researchers like Dr. Anita Archer and Dr. Julie Washington is assuredly helping to change the landscape of teaching and learning through the science of reading. That fundamental question remains of how to encourage all states to embrace the need for stronger science of reading policies that challenge former ineffective methods of how to teach reading. As a state, Alabama educators are committed to improving reading performance on the ACAP Summative and the National Assessment of Educational Progress. As Dr. Clarence Sutton, Jr., the superintendent of HCS, would say, "From Vision to Victory: Every Department. Every School. Every Student." In our district, we have realized the power of coming together to move the needle towards increased literacy.

The Value of Partnerships

Currently, in HCS, there is a strong partnership with The Schools Foundation in which first grade teachers primarily are invited to engage in a five day experience to become OG trained. The district works to ensure that costs for substitute teachers of those attending OG sessions are not incurred by the individual schools. Upon receiving training, teachers leave with a newfound sense of awareness and confidence to instruct their students. In addition, the HCS Dyslexia Coordinator, along with a kindergarten teacher at Hampton Cove Elementary School, recently became Certified Academic Language Therapists through the Academic Language Therapy Association. Moreover, there are twenty-six local reading specialist positions for all elementary schools funded by ARI and eight reading interventionist positions, which are also funded by ARI; in addition, HCS locally funds literacy specialists at several schools.

As Dr. John C. Maxwell asserts, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." Furthermore, the partnership with Lexia to provide professional development on the science of reading remains strong as there are currently three cohorts of sixty-three total HCS participants enrolled in the LETRS for Administrators course, which includes principals, assistant principals, local reading specialists, and district-level employees. Both year one and year two participants are engaged in coursework centered on concepts such as the five literacy pillars, Gough and Tunmer's Simple View of Reading, Scarborough's Reading Rope, and Ehri's Phases of Word-Reading Development, etc. (Lexia Learning, 2022). Online modules are completed, along with assigned readings in a printed course manual. Principals, assistant principals, and any participants with Professional Leadership Certificates earn Professional Learning Units and Alabama Principal Leadership Development System clock hours towards meeting stipend-earning requirements of the School Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act, which was passed in 2023 (Alabama Legislature, 2023). Local reading specialists and non-administrators are able to earn Continuing Education Units. This is evidence that when leaders have the knowledge that they need, they can then become partners in the journey to reading proficiency.

Moreover, while teachers are also encouraged to enroll in LETRS for Elementary Educators and LETRS for Early Childhood Educators, a barrier to encouraging full participation and commitment from all teachers in the primary grades have included the dissolution of the one-time $1,000 stipend that was once provided by the ALSDE. However, to counteract that, districts can promote support through the process by developing cohorts (up to twenty-five participants) of which some sessions are offered in-person, along with the completion of online course modules. The costs of substitute teachers for those enrolled in the LETRS courses within HCS are covered by the district as well. Funding support for teacher stipends and substitute

teacher costs is needed to increase participation in the LETRS courses especially as there is a need for fourth and fifth grade teachers to be trained in the science of reading.

In conclusion, one of the greatest gifts that we can give a student is the gift of reading, not just reading but proficient reading. Through knowledge, educators' abilities to close reading achievement gaps can be increased as they work to see the connections between language and reading comprehension. With support to ensure access to professional development, personnel, and resources, there is hope that greater reading proficiency levels can and will be achieved. Thank you again for this opportunity. Please share any questions that you may have.

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Mr. ADERHOLT. Very good. Thank you all, each of you, for your testimony.

We will now begin our questioning. Each member will be given about five minutes to ask questions, and I will begin.

Let me just open it up to any of the witnesses that would like to respond to this. You know, there is a broad bipartisan agreement that reading failure has long-term economic and workforce consequences. I think one thing that we can all agree on in Washington, DC, is that.

From your perspective, can maybe you talk a little bit about what specific investments that yield the highest return for taxpayers when it comes to early literacy? I will just open that up for whoever would like to jump in there and answer that.

Ms. SHORT. I do not think one item is going to really make everything that we need to have happen, happen for children. I do think it is a combination of items that work together, but I will say in Alabama, I think one of the leverage points that we have, one of the strongest elements, is the ongoing professional development we have with local reading specialists or coaches in the building of every kindergarten through third grade school.

We also have regional specialists that go in side by side. They are working in the classrooms with teachers and children supporting their efforts, and we also have coaches that support principals in the central office, and I think that is an element that is especially important as well because some of our principals in the central office do not come from backgrounds where they learned how to teach children to read. They need to be able to have those skills to be able to support their staff.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Very good.

Dr. Lane, would you like to respond?

Ms. LANE. I would, yes.

I agree wholeheartedly that literacy coaches are a really important element. As I mentioned a moment ago, I also think that ensuring that both teachers, the ones directly working with students, and school and district leaders need additional support and understanding about systems that work and things that often make reading, attempts for reading reform fail.

There is quite a bit of information out there about implementation science, and, generally, what I see in my work with districts across the country is that very few people on the ground understand the things that facilitate highly effective implementation of strong reading instruction, and so many of the reform efforts fall flat because of that.

Every State is attempting to do what Mississippi and Alabama and Louisiana have done at some level, but most do not even know where to begin because there is so much that needs to be done. Helping us expand this area of implementation science, understand how it varies from setting to setting is really an important element.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Dr. Lane, let me go ahead and ask you this question since you have got the microphone there. Should Federal dollars support preparation programs that continue to teach approaches that lack empirical support? If not, how can Congress encourage better alignment without a Federal micro managing of the system?

Ms. LANE. That is a really tough question because I think that there is a little bit of romanticism associated with local control in education. When you have local expertise, that works great. When there is little local expertise, it does not work so well.

Providing guidance in terms of what does and does not work and then expecting that if you are to receive Federal dollars for whatever, through Title I support or whatever else, that you are using effective models.

Within the realm of teacher education, I know a lot of my colleagues are working really hard to implement evidence-based practices in their educator preparation programs. Others are not, and there is no real ramification for that. So it is a problem.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you.

Ms. Short, the gains that we have seen in Alabama suggest that there is a strong State policy paired with consistent implementation on how that can work. What aspects of the Alabama's literacy success require Federal support? What worked best because of State-retained control?

Ms. SHORT. You know, I think when we talk about the Federal support, we are looking at, you know, what do we know to be harmful in situations, that we want to make sure that we are protecting the individuals that we serve. I think you have to look at those general elements.

I think supporting things we know that are grounded in the science are elements that can continue to support. Our Nation, as you pointed out earlier, in 2000, we were releasing the National Reading Panel. We had the evidence there. We fell off with following the evidence as a Nation, and we have got to come back to that.

I think building supports that put in front for us where the evidence is, is very important at the national level. I think about groups, such as the Evidence Advocacy Center that are trying to lift up just that to make sure that we do not have—we do not fall victim to things that are not following the science any longer.

As a State, I am very blessed that I have the financial support, the legislative support, the governor's support, and the State school board support to be able to implement all the things that we want to have in Alabama. Not every State has that. How do we support them as we move forward into this work and making sure that all of our students can read?

Dr. Lane mentioned about higher education. I think that is another element. We are blessed in Alabama that we have coaches that are working alongside higher education to be able to support them in their implementation, and so having that support system built in is one of those elements that I really think helps to make implementation work.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you.

My time has expired.

Ms. DeLauro.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you very much, and thank you so much for your very thoughtful testimony. There is a science which we should adhere to. I mean, we are not just pulling things out of the air, is what you are talking about.

Dr. Lane, I understand you have received multiple research grants throughout your career at the U.S. Department of Education, awards made by the Office of Special Education Programs and by the Institute of Education Sciences. Can you walk us through the research you have been able to conduct because of these funding opportunities? How did they advance your understanding of evidence-based reading instruction?

Ms. LANE. Thank you for the question.

One of the things to understand about the Science of Reading is that the vast majority of that science is a result of Federally-funded research. This is where the science comes from. Harkening back to Chairman Aderholt's question, I think that is one of the key areas of Federal funding that makes a difference. If we want to continue understanding how kids learn to read, we need to make sure that we are providing the funding for that research.

The grants that I have had have varied. They are all related to literacy in different ways. I was part of an Institute of Education Services (IES) grant that was studying reading instruction in juvenile corrections. It is an area that when we have kids who can read or who learn how to read while they are incarcerated, they have much lower rates of recidivism. They do much better in society.

Unfortunately, most correctional, juvenile correctional facilities do not attract a lot of really strong teachers, so ensuring that we have effective methods is one of the things that we were looking at.

A lot of the research that I have done has focused on early literacy and particularly phonics instruction, and that has yielded a program that we now have published called UFLI Foundations. It is a phonics program that is now used very widely across the country. In just four years since it was released, I think we are in close to 700,000 classrooms, and it is making a difference.

Phonics is not the only element that we need to be teaching, though, and research and those Federally-funded grants that focus on language development and background knowledge development are also essential. All of these different Federally-funded research opportunities weave their way into effective programs.

The development of UFLI was not solely our own research. We have the DNA of NIH, the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Department of Education (DOE) research woven all the way through our program.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you for that.

I just will make a point there that what you are talking about in the Science of Reading is former Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's original proposal for the "National Institute of Education," it led to the creation of the Institute of Education Sciences. I mention this because of your point that the Federal commitment to science and reading cannot occur without this subcommittee's steadfast support of IES and its expert staff and its funding opportunities.

Ms. Short, in your testimony, you note that high-quality—and this is a quote—"high-quality early childhood and early literacy efforts consistently show strong returns on investments." I could not agree more. I have been a strong supporter of the investment, Federal investment in early childhood.

Walk us through the benefits of high-quality early childhood education helping kids to arrive at kindergarten and first grade prepared for reading and literacy programs. What happens if a child does not have access to that high-quality early education opportunity? How difficult is it for a child to catch up with peers who have spent that time in those important early childhood programs prior to kindergarten?

Ms. SHORT. Well, I would love to share with you that every child that comes into our schools is ready to learn, but that is not the case, and we take children where they are.

Dr. Eric Mackey, our State superintendent, often says: Every child, every chance, every day. The goal is that we are looking for, with these assessments that we give, what are the risk factors? What are the areas that we need to make sure that we are supporting this child in with the deficiencies that they are showing?

Making sure that we are providing them good core instruction from the beginning, and when we see that good core instruction is not working based on the assessments that we provide, the research-based assessments, that we intervene immediately, that we are providing them the support that they need and that we involve the family.

I think that is one of the elements in our law that is a real strength is making sure that we are connecting the people who are there as the other first teachers of their child to be able to support their children. Explain to them what is taking place with the deficiencies that we are seeing and how they can be a part of helping as well.

Also, providing outside-of-school time for these students. If we have a student who is showing a consistent deficiency, our law triggers that they are automatically invited to our summer learning programs that we have. Alabama was recently the host of the National Summer Learning Association Conference because of the great work that we have been doing in our out-of-school time.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you.

My time is up. I will just say that your views and just the investment in early childhood education and literacy is, in your view, essential for our kids to be able to succeed, to be able to thrive, to be able to really move through the process at whatever level they are. That is a critical piece of trying to make sure that they have—if they do not have two years, then working to help them catch up, which is also an investment of Federal resources. It is the early childhood investment.

Where the deficiencies are, then we need to be able to provide—it would be your view that we need to provide the Federal investments in this kind of effort to allow kids to be able to thrive.

Thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Mr. Simpson.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for being here today and for your testimony.

This is a fascinating and perplexing subject. The reason I say perplexing is I have been kind of involved in this for a number of years. Thirty years ago when I was speaker of the house in Idaho, my best friend's wife taught Reading Recovery, and I made the

House and Senate Appropriations Committees in Idaho go over and spend a day with her and learn what she did and the challenges she faced.

She told me a couple of things. One of them is that if a child does not get on grade level by about the third grade, they are just going to get further and further behind, and you have essentially lost that child, and that is why third grade is so important.

The second thing she taught me was you have to get the parents involved, and these teachers that taught reading recovery would go to parents' homes in the evening to work with the parents and the child. We have parents that at home they only speak Spanish, and in school they speak English. How difficult is that and the challenges they face and stuff?

We have known this is a problem forever, and yet we keep seeing reading scores go down. Why have we not fixed it? I mean, that is the thing that is perplexing to me. You would think first, second, and third grade teachers would already know this. That would be what they would learn in college to become teachers. Why is that not happening?

Anybody want to address that and the issue of parents and getting parents involved in this also?

Ms. LANE I am happy to talk about that. I think one of the big things that I alluded to earlier was that the tools that teachers are provided overall are lacking dramatically, and so a teacher may come from a really high-quality teacher preparation program, learn effective methods, but then are provided reading programs that do not allow them to use those, what they know, in order to teach reading well. The programs are just of very poor quality.

It is a really, really concerning issue for me as someone who has developed a program. We spent years studying what needed to go into it and two years piloting it before we ever even considered publishing it. We did not set out to publish a program, and the opposite usually happens. A publisher will publish a program and then maybe go back later and study it, but it has already been sold to schools.

Teachers have to use it because that is the adopted required curriculum, but it is not working. That is one of the big issues.

The other issue that you brought up, the problem with parent involvement, what I see very often is that many parents with the children who are struggling the most in reading have literacy issues themselves, that they were poorly served by their schools. How do we expect them to then turn around and provide excellent support at home? It does not make sense, right? It does not flow.

Providing family literacy efforts that actually support the literacy development of the adult in the home is one other way that we can support children in having a literacy rich environment.

Mr. SIMPSON. Do we need to do a better job in our teacher preparation classes in colleges?

Ms. LANE. Absolutely. There is a very wide range of quality from outstanding to really, really poor, and there is no real safeguard or guidance for what exactly needs to be addressed. A lot of other professions have very clearly laid out standards or expectations of what a graduate should know and be able to do. Education really does not have that.

The Education Advocacy Center that Ms. Short mentioned is an effort to address that, to professionalize the field more, to have agreed-upon standards. You do not see in medicine or architecture or pharmacy or anything the lack of consistency that we see in education.

Mr. SIMPSON. It is frustrating. If I was a teacher and I had the skills to be able to teach that, and all of a sudden I had this program that did not actually work, I would think I would be standing on top of my desk and screaming to the superintendent and the school board and everything else that this is not working; our scores are going down, and we need to change. I think more of that needs to happen across the country.

Idaho has adopted the Science of Reading program, and they have seen over the last year our scores went up. In fact, I think Mr. Aderholt mentioned that only two States had reached pre-pandemic levels. Idaho was the other one that had reached pre-pandemic levels, but they have gone up from 66 to 70 percent at third grade reading level, which is good, but that still means about one in three students are not at reading level, and we need to do much, much, much better.

Thank you for what you do. It is very, very important. It is the most important part of primary education I think.

Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Mr. Hoyer.

Mr. HOYER. Thank you very much for what you do every day, which I think is so critical. As I told you, my wife was in early childhood education. She ran early childhood education, pre-K to third grade in Prince George's County, which is a school system of well over 100,000 people.

This is a very important issue for me and has been my entire career in the State senate and here, and I share Congressman Simpson's frustration, as I am sure you share it, that we have not gotten to where we need to be when we have statistics that children are not reaching the third grade levels at 85 and 90 percent levels, which really ought to be the case, and that ought to be our objective.

I was interested in both of you, Ms. Short and Ms. Lane, and I think Mr. Saulsberry, you as well, not quite as direct, mention the word "investment" numerous times. While I accept the theory that money is not everything, it is not, most parents, particularly elementary school parents, think they have a wonderful school if the teacher in that classroom is wonderful. Ultimately, that is the test.

You mentioned, Dr. Lane, that you had received a lot of what you know as a result of Federal research. Unfortunately, as you probably know, DOGE slashed by 50 percent the education, the research. They slashed, in addition to that, NIH and the National Security Agency (NSA), which you mentioned in your comments. If we continue to do that, what do you believe will be the result?

Ms. LANE. That is a great question.

I do believe that continued investment in education research is essential. Having served on many grant review panels, I understand how very rigorous the review process is. A grant getting through the process without it being a really high-quality thing is almost impossible. It is not completely impossible. Surely, that

could happen, but every one of the grants that we have reviewed that got funded was really rigorous, and many of the ones that did not get funded were really rigorous proposals.

I feel like there is kind of a misconception that a lot of money gets poured into education research that is not high quality and does not produce useful results. That is not the case at all. Having been on both sides of that, I know the rigor that goes into it.

The investment in education research is what brought us the Science of Reading, and if we want to continue to learn what works and continue to attempt to solve the problem, we have to continue to invest in understanding it. It is not simple. There are many different issues, and some of them are location-based kinds of issues.

We work in very affluent districts. We work in extremely resource poor districts, and they have very different issues that they are addressing. Understanding the impact of some of these demographic differences I think is really important, and we know very little at this point about those things.

Understanding, as I mentioned earlier, the implementation science and how effective instruction can be more systematically implemented and sustained over time. I think these are important things. Without continued investment, we will have no idea the effects of technological changes and how those things are affecting kids.

We are seeing more and more that some of the technological innovations are falling short and are not producing those results, but we will not know that, and so we will still be subject to the snake oil salesman if we are not investigating that——

Mr. HOYER. I want to thank you for that answer. I think it was comprehensive, and I think it is right on target.

Ms. Short—is it Dr. Short or Director Short, I suppose. You mentioned on a number of occasions coaching. These were, I presume, people who, in addition to the teacher, were in the classroom to help specifically with this particular skill, which required additional investment by Alabama and expanding the teachers that were available to that child. Is that accurate?

Ms. SHORT. Yes, sir.

Mr. HOYER. Would you think that is absolutely necessary?

Ms. SHORT. Absolutely.

Mr. HOYER. Judy, my wife, taught in an experimental school in her early career, and one of the experiments were to provide additional help within the classroom so that Judy could concentrate on the reading, most specifically, first grade. Then it required additional expenditures in that school, and that school was very successful.

Now, first of all, they picked the best teachers in the county, so it was going to be successful no matter. It was an open classroom as well, which was also part of the experiment.

Would you say that without the investment that Alabama had made in those extra resources you would have been as successful as you were or have been?

Ms. SHORT. You have just teed it up for me. Thank you so much.

Alabama is really a cautionary tale. If you go back and you look at our data over time, back in the early 2000s we were on our way. We had made the greatest gains that the National Assessment of

Educational Process (NAEP) had ever seen. We had hit the national average and then we hit proration. Our vision changed, our policy changed, our investment changed, and our data changed, not for the better.

Now that we have sound policy in place, we have invested personnel. When you talk about investment, yes, the finances are very important, but it is also the commitment of the individuals to be able to say, hey, I am standing with you. These are tough decisions that we are going to make for the benefit of children, but we are going to do what is right for the long-term success of children.

You know, that investment is really making a difference in Alabama, and I definitely think that without it, we have proven that it is problematic.

Mr. HOYER. Thank you very much to all three of you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Dr. Harris.

Mr. HARRIS. Thank you very much, and thank you, all three of you, for, you know, paying attention to taking care of our children and making sure they can succeed in a 21st century economy.

I will tell you: It is striking to me that the Federal government sometimes creates a problem and then spends a whole lot of money trying to solve it. You know, and, again, everyone on this committee knows we have a nutrition program that buys junk food and then we have to do research on how to treat obesity and overweight and spend a whole lot of money on GLP–1 drugs for children. Some people argue, well, you have got to do the research. No, you have got to go back and figure out exactly what is going on here.

I think in this case we may have created the problem, and now we are going to solve it. Why do I say that? Prevention is much better than a cure.

This book, "Failure Factory," fascinating book written by an investigative reporter—on the Baltimore City Public School system—who talks about a man born in 1908 named Thurgood Marshall. He goes to Frederick Douglass High School. His mother is a teacher, who I am sure read to him. Father taught him how to debate. He goes to Frederick Douglass High School, a segregated high school in Baltimore. He goes on to become the first African American Supreme Court Justice. Obviously, well educated; obviously, knew how to read.

That high school has zero percent of their students proficient in reading now, zero percent. What has changed? Well, our single parent—first I want to ask a question about the effect of the family on reading. You all know about the million word gap. I mean, look, you are educators. You understand it, right. If you are read to as a child, you are likely not to have the million word gap, and if you come out of a single-parent household, you are more likely to not succeed in reading and literacy.

Family literacy is really important because, you are right, we have perpetuated this problem. Maybe we need a Make America Read Again policy or something because this is not something we did not know about.

Back when I was in the state legislature, and Dr. Simpson reminded me about this, this is now 35 years ago, we had what was called the Class Size Reduction Act, and they said this was going

to solve our problems. We are going to reduce class sizes across the board. It was a big teacher union effort.

I did a little research and looked at the Tennessee Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) study, and, wow, they have done the research. They said, oh, what you have got to do is you have to reduce class sizes before third grade so students can learn how to read. Basically, that is the summary of it.

They spent a whole lot of money, increased all of the class size, and could not afford it. Now the class sizes are big throughout Maryland, and Maryland is now, though a wealthy Nation, is 40th in the Nation in reading. Under the air quotes "leadership" of our current governor, in 2024, the Board of Education decides to implement the retention policy for third grade reading but not implement it until 2027. Let us leave three more classes behind; whereas, States like Alabama, States like Mississippi are taking the lead on this.

I have just got to ask: What in the world is going on here?

This committee also should be looking at every single policy, because, again, going back to the single-parent households—and we know the data, 69 percent of Black children are born to a single family household, 52 percent of Hispanics, 28 percent of White children, and our single parent household rate is three times as high as the rest of the world. Our reading is worse than the rest of the world.

We should be looking at every single policy we have and make sure we promote a household that will support literacy. Now, it could be family literacy programs, no question about it, because we got some catching up to do.

I am just going to ask you, is that true that, in fact, family structure is an important predictor of literacy?

I will start with you, Dr. Lane.

Ms. LANE. Is it an important predictor? Absolutely.

Mr. HARRIS. Yes. Okay. Thank you.

Ms. LANE. I was going to add, a mother's level of education is one of the most highly predictive——

Mr. HARRIS. Sure, especially—yes, and again, family structure, and I get it. Family literacy is probably important.

Ms. Short.

Ms. SHORT. You know, if you have two individuals in the household, I definitely think there is more language likely to be spoken. That is beneficial. I also do not think it is the determinant. The children come to us——

Mr. HARRIS. Of course not. Just like childhood obesity, what you eat is not the sole determinant.

Ms. SHORT. We are going to make sure we provide whatever we can for them.

Mr. HARRIS. Mr. Saulsberry.

Mr. SAULSBERRY. Yes, I do agree that it is important, that family structure is very important, and as you were speaking, I was reminded of a school that has a school-to-home literacy project. It has been amazing. They actually won an award for it.

I think about those families that have multiple students in the home, you know. Whatever we can do to send a book home, this

particular school, Montview Elementary sends a book home with their students.

Just imagine the power of reading in that home, because now my older sibling or whomever is bringing it home. Now we are all having that reading time around the book of the week or maybe the book of the month.

I do agree that it is important. Going to libraries, doing whatever it takes, encouraging competition with reading. Elevated reader initiatives or whatever competition can be encouraged, I do agree that it is important.

Mr. HARRIS. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Mr. Pocan.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks for having this hearing, and thanks to the witnesses for being here.

Let me go back to the testimonies you all gave. I think each of you talked about the emphasis on professional development for teachers. I do think, as much as we want to avoid the snake oil salesmen and get the right programming, if you do not have that right teacher with the professional development to do that programming, it is much more difficult.

Wisconsin is one of those States that passed a Science of Reading law as well. We appreciate the work that you are doing, especially in Alabama and Florida, on this; but, in the last budget cycle, Title II–A funding, which is probably the largest Federal investment in teacher professional development, was completely eliminated by the White House in their budget. Fortunately, we were able to put that back in moving forward, but we are going to have another budget coming to us very soon.

I know, Ms. Lane, Dr. Lane, you specifically talked about teachers' prep and supporting educators on this. Ms. Short, you talked about support for educators and ongoing professional development. Mr. Saulsberry, you also talked about supporting teachers and professional development.

Could you just address—if you cannot address the fund specifically, I understand. You do not work directly with that, but why investing in that professional development is integral to this work that you are doing.

Anyone who wants to take it is more than welcome, or all of you.

Ms. SHORT. Yes, the Science of Reading is complex. As Ranking Member DeLauro mentioned earlier, it involves those five pillars, and those five pillars have elements all within them.

We are looking at individuals who are coming with their own background, and we are having to navigate what are the areas that they are strong in and what are the areas that they are weak in.

Having that knowledge, making sure that we have the professional learning, the understanding of what the Science of Reading is and, probably more importantly, what it is not is essential for our teachers to make sure that they have that.

I mentioned to you earlier about coaching in Alabama. You know Alabama is known for their football. I am remiss in not bringing that up, but obviously the first-string players, they have coaches.

Coaches are not just for the weak, coaches are for everyone. Everyone deserves a coach. Everyone deserves to have someone who

is going to work alongside them and see how can we make this better for the outcome that you are looking for.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you.

Mr. SAULSBERRY. I would also like to add, you know, it is very important that we challenge the mental models of how teachers, as they are coming into the classroom, were taught how to read themselves. They are thinking, maybe I need to take the approach that I was taught.

That professional development (PD) is important for them, such as I mentioned in my testimony about LETRS for Elementary Educators and/or early childhood educators, taking those teachers through those courses.

Even if you cannot do that, our coaches, our reading specialists are very important. They have to implement—let us just say for first semester in our district, there were 18 PD sessions that they had to turn around at schools.

There were full coaching cycles, which could be anywhere from six to eight weeks. Many coaching cycles may be roughly one to two weeks that they are expected to implement.

Even if I cannot go enroll in a full course, maybe I have demands from my family at home or maybe I am pursuing another degree, you know, I am able to get something during that day from another educator who can assist me in really breaking down those challenges that maybe I am encountering maybe at the small group table with my students.

I think the professional development, the funds that we have for substitute teachers to pay them so that teachers can have days to go and get the learning that they need or have time to work on any requirements that they need to submit for the Alabama Literacy Act, et cetera, I think that is very important.

Ms. LANE. One of the things that Ms. Short mentioned earlier was the statewide effort to really build background knowledge about reading.

When we go into a school or a district to prepare them to implement our program, one of the things that we can immediately tell is if they have had that kind of background knowledge building, and it is not a quick one-day workshop.

We are talking long hours spent really digging in and learning, and, if you do not have that professional development, then the science just stays with the academics. We need to get it into the hands and into the minds of the teachers who are using it.

Coaching is one of the most powerful tools if you have a really well-trained literacy coach that can guide a teacher, model effective lessons for them, help them plan effective instruction, you will see better outcomes.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Ms. Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you.

Thank you all for being here.

Dr. Lane, I am from Palm Beach County, and our school system actually has a contract with University of Florida on your subject. My son is a Gator. Go Gators. Also, he reads very well.

It is interesting how one of my colleagues introduced the subject of the single parent. I want to just say I look at what you are pro-

moting, which sounds very logical. It is a tool, but it is not the end all, because, I mean, you know, just look at this committee. We do not just deal with education. We deal with health. We deal with safety for children.

I would like to just hear your comment on the importance of taking care of a child, making sure they have the nutrition, the health, the stable family, how that makes your job easier. Who wants to start?

Ms. LANE. Sure. Certainly, when a child comes to school with extensive language experience, where they have been spoken with a lot at home and in preschool settings, when they are healthy and they do not have urgent other more pressing concerns in their lives and they can focus on learning, when they are well-fed and can focus on learning, they do better, absolutely. They come to school ready to learn and they do learn. When those things are absent in their lives, it certainly has an impact.

In terms of the work of educators everywhere, it makes a huge difference. However, those children exist, and we still need to teach them. We need to not expect that, oh, they will not be able to learn because they do not have all of this ideal circumstance. We need to ensure that we are using effective practices.

Ms. FRANKEL. Yes. I mean, we have seen over the past year or so we are going to see cuts to the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), which is food security, food security to parents. We are going to see people losing their healthcare.

Mr. Saulsberry, I do not think we have given you the time that you deserve to answer some of these questions, but can you explain why it is important also for the parents to be well-fed, to be healthy, to have a job.

Incidentally, there are 10 million children growing up in single-family homes, and we are not going to play the match game, folks. Okay. That is like, really?

What is it that the parents need?

Mr. SAULSBERRY. For the parents, I think about the different demands. You have several parents who are working more than one job. You may have parents who are taking care of elderly family members. We even have teachers who are taking care of elderly family members.

There are additional people in the home that they are trying to feed, and they are working against or working with all of the different systems that they are trying to get that funding from or get that support from to help pay a bill or whatever it may be or to help keep food on the table so that everyone is fed.

Parents really sometimes in some situations are really relying upon, you know, what is happening at the school. Anything that we can do to provide a Full Tummy bag to make sure that the kid is getting those meals each day. Sometimes it is three meals a day.

For us, we provide tutoring after school. Some schools do it before school. The students are able to get an additional meal even if they are not staying for tutoring, an additional meal to take home maybe on the bus or maybe in the car. That helps take some of that stress off of, you know, okay, you have not eaten and I have got to rush home and get a meal prepared for you.

If the parents are knowing that their kids are taken care of, if they know that they are taken care of, they have more confidence maybe to say, "You know what, let me sit down at the table with you and work on this homework assignment or read to you."

Ms. FRANKEL. I am sorry to interrupt you. I am running out of time. Thank you for sharing that.

Mr. SAULSBERRY. Okay.

Ms. FRANKEL. Because here is the point, and I have a couple more things: When Grandma or Grandpa gets kicked out of a nursing home because of the Medicaid cuts, right, or we lose all our workers in the nursing homes because they are being sent back to Haiti, the fact of the matter is that is more stress on the family.

The point really I want to make, which is this, I mean—and thank you, because we are using your tool of science in Palm Beach County.

The point I want to make is, and this committee has the ability in so many ways to make sure that children get off to a good start. We should understand that there are policies that we are engaged in right now that make it much harder to implement what you are talking about today. Thank you very, very much for being here.

Mr. SAULSBERRY. Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Mr. Clyde.

Mr. CLYDE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing before this subcommittee today.

I just came from the Budget Committee, where we had the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) Director Swagel in front of us, so I appreciate the time.

I am encouraged to hear of your commitment to advancing literacy through the Science of Reading that puts results first and empowers educators, families, and States to lead the way, because I think education should be done at the lowest level possible, the closest to parents and students.

Today, we face a national crisis in reading proficiency. However, Federal costs on education have only skyrocketed since the 1960s. U.S. taxpayers have spent nearly $3 trillion on education in public schools, yet test scores have failed to meaningfully improve, with only about one-third of our fourth- and eighth graders reading at proficient levels, according to the latest National Assessment of Education Progress data.

This is not just an education failure; it is a threat to America's self-reliance, its future workforce, and its global competitiveness. For much too long, Federal education policy has embraced radical ideology, ineffective mandates, and bureaucratic compliance that wasted America's tax dollars without delivering real outcomes for students.

That is what I want. I want real outcomes for students. I want our students to excel. Given this, I think it is time to rethink Federal involvement in literacy, focusing on what actually works, which are State-led initiatives, rigorous teacher preparation, and accountability tied to measurable results like grade-level proficiency. We can no longer afford to subsidize failure at the expense of America's students.

I am a businessman. I believe in return on investment. I think that is the way we grow and the way we make things better.

Dr. Lane, my first question is for you, ma'am. Federal education funding has grown dramatically over the past several decades, yet literacy outcomes have remained largely stagnant, from what I have seen.

From a research perspective, which literacy investments show the strongest return on taxpayer dollars, return on investment (ROI), and which types of spending have the weakest or have no demonstrated impact on reading proficiency? What are your thoughts? What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. LANE. All right, so in terms of investments that have made a big impact, high-quality instruction and making sure that teachers understand how to implement that is the most direct impact.

There have been numerous studies over the years of different kinds of instruction. One of the most famous studies in reading was the follow-through studies, one of the largest Federal investments of research dollars in looking specifically at how kids were doing in reading.

Very little came out of that, not because there were not programs identified as very effective and instructional methods identified as very effective, but it was not politically popular.

Mr. CLYDE. The will to implement?

Ms. LANE. That the particular programs that were shown to be effective and the particular programs that were shown to be ineffective were not the popular faddish programs.

The program that was found to be very effective was direct instruction and an explicit way of teaching young children. It proved to be very effective, but the results of that were really never disseminated, because of political pressures.

I think that is one of the things that we need to understand is that really honing in on what does and does not work and ensuring that programs that do not work are not permitted.

We have so much expectation of a program that has all the bells and whistles must work best, and that is seldom the case. Sometimes, the bare bones, really simple types of instruction work best.

Mr. CLYDE. Getting back to the basics.

Ms. LANE. Yes, absolutely.

Mr. CLYDE. Thank you.

Ms. LANE. That is not to suggest that, you know—we developed a phonics program, so folks may think that I think phonics is the end-all and be-all. It is absolutely not. We have to have really strong language development, really strong content and knowledge building as well.

Those things are just now starting to gain traction in the education field. If we do not have all of those things together, then we are not going to see our return on investment at all.

Mr. CLYDE. Well, thank you.

In just the few seconds I have left, Ms. Short, if I may, initiatives under Alabama's Literacy Act have shown remarkable results through State-led implementation and family-focused communication.

How can we further support similar State initiatives without imposing burdensome mandates or a one-size-fits-all kind of requirement that undermine local, the local education boards?

Ms. SHORT. I definitely think continuing to support the States in funding is an important element. I also think, to kind of piggyback off of what Dr. Lane said, there are some safeguards that we can put into place to help protect to make sure that we are not investing in programs that are known to be detrimental.

Mr. CLYDE. Well, thank you very much.

With that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Okay. Mrs. Watson Coleman.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you very much.

I want to thank all three of you, because this has been very enriching for me. I am not an educator, but I am very concerned. I come from New Jersey. In New Jersey, we have 600-plus school districts. In New Jersey, folks are always talking about nationally, we come up number two, number three within the, you know, five States the best at this, the best at that. Yet, 53 percent of our students are not reading at grade level.

I am wondering if there are studies which have been done in the areas in which the same resources have been applied, financial resources, but the outcomes have not evidenced improvement.

I want to start with you, Mr. Saulsberry, and then I would like for you, Dr. Lane and Ms. Short, to respond.

Mr. SAULSBERRY. Right now, I am thinking of actually the community that I am from in which we had the funding, we had the support, and there were gains a bit above the State average in reading.

That is my best example of where, you know, when the resources are there, when the professional development is there, when the support is there, even for families, that things can move forward.

I do not have maybe that best example of when you are pouring that in and it is not happening. I do not have that best example, but I do know of an example where if you surround that school district or surround that community with the support they need that you can see the gains.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. How many school districts are there in Alabama?

Mr. SAULSBERRY. 149, possibly.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Versus 600-and-some in New Jersey. That is crazy.

Mr. SAULSBERRY. Yes.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Anyone else have a comment about this? Have you seen research about why it does not work in the poorest, whether they are rural or urban school districts and the students are not performing, yet you are seeing the dollars go into the effort?

Ms. LANE. There is quite a bit of research on the role of context in the implementation of a program or the implementation of any type of instructional reform. The research basically is helping us understand that context does matter, and——

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. What does that mean?

Ms. LANE. What does it mean that context matters?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. What does it mean when you are talking about in this instance context matters?

Ms. LANE. Well, when we have a district that has a lot of educator expertise, both the teacher in the classroom and at the district level, then things tend to get implemented more systematically.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Has the research found that you do not have those educational experts in those poor areas or in those urban areas or those segregated areas? Is there a correlation?

Ms. LANE. There tend to be—they tend to have a lot harder time recruiting teachers and keeping teachers. The teacher workforce situation in general is such that teachers are leaving the field in droves. Most teachers do not last more than three years in the field.

We are investing in high-quality teacher preparation and then they do not stick around, because the working conditions are really problematic, and there is quite a bit of research on that.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Ms. Short, do you think that there is a relationship between poverty, race, things of that nature, socioeconomic issues, that we are not addressing sufficiently to make those outcomes better in those areas that are not showing the kind of improvement, yet resources to the educational—to the schools and to the programs at the schools are actually happening?

Is there a discorrelation between poverty, race, segregation, racism, whatever, and low expectations?

Ms. SHORT. What we are seeing in Alabama is that the plan that we are working right now is working for all children. We are seeing increased literacy rates in every demographic, in every subpopulation on our State assessment.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Are you doing things with the whole family? Is it holistic?

Ms. SHORT. Everyone in our State receives support. The level of support they receive is based on their outcome data. Our schools that we see are needing the most support based on their outcome data, our Literacy Act prescribes how much time our regional coaches spend in those schools to provide them the support.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I am going to yield back, but I really have not hit that nut yet, which is I need to understand what kind of support those communities need that they are not getting in terms of how they are living, how they are living, and the impact of that on their children's outcomes.

Thank you very much. I yield back.

Ms. LANE. May I comment more on that? Is that allowed?

Mr. ADERHOLT. Go ahead.

Ms. LANE. I just wanted to bring up an example. We are working with a school in Wisconsin. Wisconsin has one of the largest racial literacy gaps in the country.

One of our mantras at the University of Florida Literacy Institute is it is not these kids. It is this instruction. If you give really solid instruction, you will get good results no matter what kids are sitting in front of you.

The school that we are working with in Wisconsin, we are hoping to develop it into kind of a model demonstration site. It is a charter school, but it is unlike a lot of other charter schools in that they

actively seek kids who other schools would rather not have. It is predominantly black, predominantly low social and economic standing (SES), but the school itself is committed to ensuring really good outcomes for these children.

They take a holistic approach, and they do things like they have started—they have worked with philanthropies. They are able to provide support for families that go through a financial literacy program. Those families get access to funding for a down payment to purchase a home that then provides a stable place for these children to live.

It is a wraparound kind of approach, and they have lots of other initiatives, but they are seeing really good outcomes in a State where the outcomes for the students they serve are not good. I think learning from examples like that is such an important piece of what we need to do.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Mr. Harder.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you so much to all of our witnesses for being here, and a huge thanks to our chair and ranking member for making this hearing possible, one of the few bipartisan education hearings we have had in Congress in recent years.

There used to be a lot of discussion on education in a bipartisan way. We had No Child Left Behind during the Bush Administration. We had Race to the Top during the Obama Administration.

Then we have really had a lost decade where there has not been an enormous amount of attention or enough concern at the Federal level but also in many States on how we can make sure that kids are getting the reading/math outcomes that we need.

I think one big reason for that is we have run out of ideas. We have really lost hope that we can change student trajectories. I want to thank all of you for giving us some of that hope, because it is so rare in education to find success stories that scale from one amazing teacher through to one class through to a whole school through to a whole State, let alone to multiple States.

That is why I think this is such a remarkable story is that it has been both scaled and replicated across several different States.

One area of concern that I want to dig into is that many States think they are doing this and yet the outcomes disagree. Forty States since 2013 have passed some semblance of reading bills. They are patting themselves on the back and they are saying, we are using phonics, everything is fantastic in the classroom, and yet their reading outcomes are not budging.

I think it is really important to understand what has happened that is different in Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama that has not actually happened in these 37 other States that are telling themselves that they have the right curriculums but are lacking some of those different elements.

Dr. Lane, you have probably the best comparative understanding of what is going on in different States. What do you think is different about the States that have actually seen reading outcomes improve and the States that have not?

Ms. LANE. Well, quite honestly, States like Alabama have expertise, people who know what they are doing leading the efforts. That is not true in all of the States.

We have people in leadership roles in education who do not understand reading, and when you do not understand it, you just do not bother with it as much. It is not as much of a priority.

What they are attempting to do in a lot of settings is check off the boxes that have emerged as, oh, this is what made Mississippi successful. This is what made Alabama successful. We will just check those things off, but we are not really investing our time and our effort in learning and understanding them.

I think that is the thing that I see most from one State to the next, because we do deal with schools in every State. The context could not be more different. It almost always comes back to leadership and what did the people in charge know and what are they able to do in order to effect the kind of changes we want to see.

Mr. HARDER. Sure. I hear you on that. I will say, you know, Maryland has hired Dr. Carey Wright from Mississippi, and I think it is a little bit too early to tell what is going to go on in Maryland, but they certainly have not seen, you know, the recent improvements that Mississippi has had.

Just to push back a little bit, I think what I see is a couple really important components that I think can be scaled through other States.

I see a curriculum-aligned teacher training that is driven down into the schools and is evidence-backed. I see accountability metrics and screening that often are not implemented well in other States.

How do you sort of think about the role of accountability, and do you think that it is a key differentiator between the Mississippis and Alabamas and Louisianas of the world and the States that have not necessarily seen significant reading improvements?

Ms. LANE. I do. I think that accountability certainly is a big driver in most States. I know that, in Florida, under Jeb Bush is when a lot of those things got implemented that have made Florida more successful in reading.

We have not grown to the same degree as a lot of these other States in recent years, but a lot of those institutional systemic kind of things have mattered. Ultimately, though, I think the effort to do things quickly often results in them being done badly.

Chairman Aderholt mentioned the Mississippi miracle is more accurately known as the Mississippi marathon. It started 15 years ago. It did not start last year or the year before, and the investment of time and effort and expertise is what has made such a difference there.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you.

Final question: What do you think is the role of Federal support to help States distinguish between evidence-backed programs, effective programs, and ineffective programs? How do you think that we use Federal resources to drive towards those outcomes that we all want?

Ms. LANE. I feel like the Federal government has kind of kept their hands off in terms of not allowing the Department of Education to make any kind of recommendation of a particular curricula.

The only entity that attempts to do that is the What Works Clearinghouse, a function of the Institute of Education Sciences. Although it has a lot of excellent resources, it has fallen short in

this particular regard, mostly because I think it does a very poor job of translating research in ways that can be accessible to practitioners.

They do not, for example, make it clear the distinction between this was a high-quality study versus it had really good outcomes.

They are very, very restrictive of what gets reviewed. It has to have a standard of research that without a lot of research, funding cannot happen.

The randomized control trial for a program, that is something that is very expensive to get. If you do not have that level of support, you will not get reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse.

Helping practitioners understand the pros and cons of different programs beyond that when they do not have that level of evidence behind them does not mean they are not good. They just do not have that kind of study that shows how good they are.

Having an entity like What Works Clearinghouse be more practitioner-friendly and usable in that respect could have a tremendous impact on what happens in schools.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Ms. Dean.

Ms. DEAN. I thank you, Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro.

Thank you for convening this hearing. Thank you for the three testifiers today. I admire your passion and your expertise with probably one of the most critical roles that any of us will ever play, educating our kids, teaching them a love of reading.

I come at this as a mom to three sons, grown sons, but now grandmother to seven little ones. It is so fun to watch a kid—and it is renewed in me with my new little ones—find a love of language and want to turn the page and understand what that word is. Thank you for what you do with such passion and expertise.

I am a former professor of writing at LaSalle University for 10 years. Of course, what you are talking about and what you do leads directly to what I had fun doing, which was teaching writing and rhetoric and ethics and the use of language.

I come at it at a time we all are talking about this, and that is why I am glad for the focus on it in this committee.

My home State is Pennsylvania. About one-third of fourth graders in 2024 were proficient in reading. It is, I think, a very sad statistic.

We talk about the gift of learning to read. I think it is the right. I think every child has the right to know how to read, because that is absolutely the key to their future. If we got that right, we would solve so many other ills.

Every other subject becomes difficult when a child struggles. You have all talked about that. Children from low-income families as well as children of color, Black and Hispanic. In our State, sadly, the numbers are even worse. Those inequities follow children into adulthood, holding them back from their future.

We have heard today through your expertise that children do not fail to learn. We are failing to teach them and to adequately prepare and resource those who teach our children. It is not the children's fault.

What I think about is—and maybe I will start with you, Mr. Saulsberry, your stories and anecdotes in education have been really interesting.

Building on what Mr. Harder was asking about, from the Federal level, here we are. This committee has a focus on education.

What do you think the Federal government can do to support States and school districts in this teaching through Science of Reading?

Mr. SAULSBERRY. As I mentioned in some of what I submitted, really ensuring that we have access to giving that support to the classroom. We are looking at initiatives that go beyond grade three currently.

If I am that student that, you know, if I did well or, you know, I was sufficient as a third grader and I was able to go on to fourth grade, I will still need that support.

If we can get professional development for our fourth and fifth grade teachers and even beyond—I mean, even after the elementary grades, students are sometimes still behind, right?

If we can get that support for ensuring that those fourth and fifth grade teachers, who may not have had that motivation to enroll in a LETRS for Elementary Educators course, and so now there is that motivation to now get more knowledge of the Science of Reading training. Giving them that support. Giving support for intervention.

Even when I have done what I need to do in the classroom for different tiers of instruction, tier one, tier two instruction. When it is time for that tier three piece, you know, if I am going to ask the classroom teacher to be the one to do that, do I have what I need? Then, if it is not me, is there someone else who can come in and support that work of working with those students?

I would say the professional development, the appropriate personnel, additional support for coaching. Right now, we do I feel a good job of coaching grades K through 3, but maybe not, you know, as far as——

Ms. DEAN [continuing]. In the country. We need to be doing that as——

Mr. SAULSBERRY. Yes. Yes, in our State.

Going beyond that third grade, going beyond third grade and giving the coaching and support that is needed for fourth and fifth grade teachers and maybe even beyond that.

Ms. DEAN. I know you all know this, but we are talking about a backdrop of this administration, as evidenced in Project 2025 on what I think is page 319, an ambition—and the Secretary of Education sat here in this very committee room—an ambition to shutter of Federal Department of Education.

I decry that kind of nonsense. If we want to be the great country that I know we are, we educate our children well, and the Federal government has a role to play.

Could somebody comment briefly, if you would, on the Science of Reading methodology as it affects children with differences, learning differences, and disabilities?

Ms. LANE. I would be happy to. That is my area. I am a professor of special education.

Honestly, when you were asking your previous question, it made me think of something specific that I did not get to in my response to Ranking Member DeLauro.

That is in the grant funding that we have received at the University of Florida, a lot of the grants are not research grants, they are personal preparation grants, and so we have this really tragic workforce problem in education.

In special education, there have been available grants to support the training of special education teachers, so giving someone an incentive, essentially, to maybe make a career change and go into education, because we are so desperate for them, and it functions pretty much like a loan.

It has a service obligation attached. If you do not teach for however many years as assigned to the grant, then you have to pay it back. There is some guarantee that there will be some dividend paid from it.

In terms of the types of reading instruction that we are talking about, reaching children with disabilities, our focus is we do a lot of work with preparing teachers to work with children with dyslexia particularly.

The same practices work across whether you have a disability or not. The amount of time, the amount of practice that you need with the skills is the main distinguisher of what instruction will look like in various contexts, but the same science applies, essentially.

Ms. DEAN. I appreciate that and I do appreciate the extra time to hear about instruction for children with disabilities, but also the important role the Federal government plays in supporting States and supporting teachers and supporting the research and the wraparound. We need to do more of that, not less.

Thank you. I yield back.

Ms. LANE. I agree.

Mr. ADERHOLT. I know we are closing in on close to two hours in the hearing but, Ms. DeLauro, if you have got something you want, let me defer to you before we close out the hearing. Ms. DeLauro, you have the floor.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank my colleagues. I think that this has been a—when I say an intense hearing, a hearing filled with real content and information about how we should proceed on what is a fundamental issue in our society, and that is the reading capabilities of our children.

For me, it sounds like there are pockets and places in this Nation where there are models of programs that are succeeding, that are working.

Now, it may be that is—I understand State-by-State, et cetera, but our children are not just State-by-State. It is about looking at how children across the board from wherever they are, are being given the opportunity for success, and the teachers, and the teachers provided with the tools that they need.

I think we compartmentalize something that is not having the broadest and biggest effect overall on the Nation on this national issue. There is then a Federal role in this effort, which we should not be afraid to acknowledge.

No one is proclaiming that, like it is—you know, when people want to just editorialize and say, oh, it is the Federal government and it is reaching down and it is—hell, no. It is about looking at what are the best practices? What is working nationwide? What is providing the biggest and broadest effect on reading?

We have looked at—and I am going to make an assumption because the answer to this would be yes. I would just say to the chair, I believe we need to reconvene the National Reading Panel.

I think we did this in—it has been 26 years since we did this, and this is the committee that did it. We can do that and, you know, go back and take a look at what has happened to find more research on the Science of Reading. What topics now should we be focused on? I think that this is a proper role for this committee to engage on.

I just would say—I have a couple more things. The chair is usually indulgent of my making comments.

Look, I would like to know, when Mississippi today is the gold standard or it appears to be a gold standard, what are the Federal resources that have helped to provide that effort? Okay. Is it Title I, IDEA, Title II–A, which is the professional development? Is that the case in Alabama? Where is, writ large, the Federal role in helping us to achieve the goals in this area?

I take you—and I am sorry, Mr. Saulsberry. I was going to ask you about building on the phonics instruction, and it is not the only piece, but how do you build on that effort? How do we sustain and increase our investments in Federal education research? The Science of Reading would not exist without it.

If we know that and understand that, if you have so well portrayed today, then there should not be any question about our looking at increased investments in this education effort.

What Works, you talked about the What Works Clearinghouse, an education department can translate. How do we translate effective practices to districts, safeguard against the snake oil salesmen? How do we sustain our commitments to Federal education programs?

I am going to just say it. We had to fight like hell on a bipartisan basis to make sure that Title I, IDEA, Title II–A, early childhood were provided with resources for them to do the job that they are intended to do.

We should not have to fight like hell to do that. There ought to be an understanding that this is where the strength of this Nation lies. I am going to just ask all of you. Your testimony is on point, not afraid to speak up about what works and what does not work.

We do not say everything works and here is all the money to do even things that do not work. Hell, no again. It is what works. You have identified things that are working, as the Federal government, which is the largest source of resources.

My State of Connecticut is going to put up $4.5 million to deal with coaches. You pointed out people need coaches, because they see it is something that we should do. At the Federal level, you need to help us say, these are the things that you should be doing. This is an appropriate role for the Federal government.

Do not tell us everything we have to do but help us to reach the goals and the vision that we know can work, because of the work that we are doing and we understand it.

I am just asking you—first of all, I want to thank you. You know, it is in-depth testimony today from all of you and it works, but help us to help you but, more importantly, help us help you help our kids, no matter where they are, no matter where they are, no matter what that background is.

Because, when you provide a kid with the opportunities and the environment in which to thrive, that child will thrive. We know it. You know it. Help us to make that case here. Tell your story writ large.

Thank you so much for being here. I really appreciate it.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this hearing today.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you.

Well, thank you. I think this has been a good hearing. It has been very good to hear from all of you here today, and really how we can try to highlight the tremendous work of State and local leaders in trying to advance what, you know, we call the Science of Reading.

I was very happy to see this article in the New York Times about how three southern States are the best hope in schooling. That was just published earlier this month, and so very glad to see my home State of Alabama being mentioned on that as one as well.

With that, the hearing is adjourned, and we look forward to working with you and following your success as you help students across America be able to read better and especially from a very early age.

Thank you, and we are dismissed.

[Whereupon, at 12:22 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2026.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE: AMERICA'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES

WITNESSES

DR. PATRICIA G. SIMS, PRESIDENT, DRAKE STATE COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE

DR. BRAD HALL, PRESIDENT, BLACKFEET COMMUNITY COLLEGE

SHALIN JYOTISHI, FOUNDER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, FUTURE OF WORK AND INNOVATION ECONOMY INITIATIVE, NEW AMERICA

SHAWN M. MORGAN, VICE PRESIDENT OF WORKFORCE AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES, BEVILL STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Mr. ADERHOLT. Good morning, everyone. It is good to have everyone here in the Labor, Health, and Human Services Subcommittee today. Thanks to our witnesses for coming to testify this morning on the topic of community colleges. We will hear from these innovative leaders about how their institutions are preparing students for promising careers and delivering an education that is lined with workforce needs, and at the same time, being cost-effective. I look forward to hearing about their efforts to help students succeed and become workforce ready, and what we should know as we examine programs in this subcommittee's jurisdiction.

The secret is clearly out, and that is the value that community colleges deliver students and the local economy. According to the National Student Clearinghouse, community college enrollment grew three percent in the fall of 2025. That is double the 1.4 percent increase at public four-year colleges. Enrollment increased 1.9 percent in certificate programs, and by 2.2 percent in associate degree programs. That is faster than the approximately one percent increase for the bachelor's program.

It is clear that many students are eager to enter, or reenter the workforce, more quickly after getting the necessary skills and training in less time and in less money than the traditional four-year degree. That should not come as any surprise as more Americans are questioning what exactly they are getting from a college degree.

A September 20, 2025, Gallup Poll found that the share of Americans who view college as very important has fallen to 35 percent, and that is down from 75 percent in 2010. A separate NBC News poll this past November found only one-third of Americans think that four-year college degrees is worth the cost, down from about half saying it was worth it in 2017.

Now to be sure, by highlighting the success of community college, we are no way downplaying the role of four-year institutions. For many years, the Federal approach to higher education made priority and greater access enrollment for four-year institutions. While

a four-year degree can bring some great career opportunities and higher lifetime earnings, the experience is far from universal.

The Federal government invested $131 billion annually in financial aid through loans and grants. Despite this outsized investment, too many students do not see the expected benefits, and unfortunately, a few end up worse off financially.

It is encouraging that leaders at community colleges around the country are focused on programs and strategies to set students up for success. Their institutions offer opportunities to learn and gain experience in high-demand fields, avoiding an expensive degree that is not in demand by industry.

Our Nation's community colleges serve students in all stages of life: students seeking their high school diploma equivalency; those who graduated high school years ago; those that are working students with children; students which seek to switch career fields; and those looking for a specific skills to advance in their existing career.

Many students enroll part-time because they do not want, or they cannot afford to miss a paycheck in the interim. Community colleges excel at tailoring their programs to all students, offering a range of programs from stackable credentials to associate's degree, and offering flexible course schedules at nights and on weekends, or sometimes even online. Through dual enrollment programs, community colleges are a connection for our K–12 schools, giving students exposure to college material and career opportunities they may not have known otherwise or know was available to them.

Through partnerships with local employers, community colleges integrate hands-on learning, which means students can be immersed in the most up-to-date training standards and equipment.

Community colleges offer tremendous value. Average end district tuition and fees for a public two-year school total just over $4,000 in year 2024–2025. Nearly $8,000 less than an in-state cost for a public four-year high school.

Today, we will hear from higher education and workforce development leaders about what they are doing to prioritize student success and respond to the needs in the workforce. These leaders across the country from Browning, Montana, all the way to my home state of Alabama are forward-thinking and responsive to the needs of both students and surrounding industry. Securing strong pipelines of workers in critical fields is a win-win for students, and also for employers, and also for our economy. Whether it is nursing homes, commercial truck drivers, line workers, advanced manufacturing, skilled industry trades, or fields like hospitality and education, our workforce needs are growing.

Amid an aging population, we also contend with worker shortages and finding new ways to mitigate them. Rural areas, much like the district I represent, feel the pressure of addressing workforce shortages acutely. Today, we look forward to hearing about the success of these schools and how they are focused on improving students' outcomes.

Before I turn to the Ranking Member for her remarks, I would like to introduce our first witnesses. First is Dr. Patricia Sims who is president of J.F. Drake State Community and Technical College

in Huntsville, Alabama. I am going to save the next guest to be introduced—Brad Hall—by one of my colleagues in just a minute. Then also, I am pleased that we are going to also hear from Mr. Shawn Morgan, vice president of Workforce and Strategy Initiative at Bevill State Community College located in the district that I represent. Also, we have Shalin Jyotishi.

Mr. JYOTISHI. Jyotishi.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Okay. Founder of Work and Innovation Economy Initiative at New America. I am glad to have each of you here and look forward to you sharing your expertise with us today.

If I could turn now to—we will go ahead and allow Mr. Zinke from Montana to recognize one of our panelists as well.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am honored to recognize and introduce Brad Hall. He is the president of the Blackfeet Community College. The Blackfeet have been around a long time. Some say about 40,000 years. They are a sovereign nation. As a sovereign nation they have unique challenges of that. I have talked to multiple students that attend the university or the community college, and all of them say the same thing: they finally have a sense of belonging, a sense of accomplishment, and a desire to return the favor and make the Blackfeet Nation stronger.

It is my distinct honor to introduce a champion of Tribal Community Colleges and one that cares, and he is perfect for the job. Brad Hall, thank you, and I look forward to your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Well, let me welcome all of you here today. Now I would like to turn to my Ranking Member for her opening remarks.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and to our witnesses: Dr. Sims, Dr. Hall, Mr. Morgan, Mr. Jyotishi for making time today to share your valuable, valuable insights with our committee. It is no secret that just about everything in this country is more expensive now; groceries, housing, utilities, and Lord knows healthcare. The cost of education is by no means an exception to this trend.

We have told a generation of Americans that the surest path out of cyclical poverty, to upward social mobility, financial security, and a better future for our children and their children after them is a college education. However, that path has become prohibitively expensive for far too many people.

Over the last 30 years, tuition for a public four-year college has doubled, and that is after accounting for inflation. For the 2025–2026 academic year, tuition for a four-year public college was $11,950 on average, and that is before housing, textbooks, and other costs. It is no wonder that upon graduation from a public four-year institution, the typical student has accumulated over $27,000 in student debt.

I firmly believe that what we have told the generation of Americans remains true: education is the best pathway to success. Education is the great equalizer. It is about success, stability, and prosperity. We as a government, as a society, have not kept up our end of the bargain. The terms of the deal have gotten worse, and it is our responsibility here in this building to do everything that we can to fix it.

Fortunately, part of the solution is right here in front of us today. While tuition at public four-year institutions has gone up, two-year public colleges, community colleges has actually decreased by 10 percent in the past decade, after adjusting for inflation. Full-time tuition for community college sits at $4,150 on average, roughly one-third the cost of a four-year public institution. In the fall of 2023, around six million students were enrolled in community colleges throughout the country.

Many Americans recognize the clear benefits of attending community college. A greater share of community college students work full-time while getting their degree. Many are parenting, caring for their families, and are able to take advantage of the flexibility that community college provides while receiving a high-quality education.

I want to hone in on this point specifically for a moment: a high-quality education. There is a persistent and inaccurate notion that persists that a community college education is somehow lesser, or inadequate. It is not. In a recent survey of administrators at two-year and four-year colleges alike, roughly three-quarters agree that students who transfer to four-year institutions from community colleges, perform as well as or better than students who started at that institution as a freshman.

The only thing that is inadequate with regard to community college is our investment in it. Not only financially, although that is crucial, but programmatic and institutional investments providing new opportunities for students at local businesses, governments, and organizations to avail themselves of their untapped potential.

Despite our greater share of community college students working full-time while they are enrolled, only 1.4 percent receive any Federal work study aid, in stark contrast to the 14 percent of undergraduates at private, nonprofit four-year colleges who do.

We must do more to bridge the gap between industries in need of a talented workforce, and students eager to contribute their skills to the communities and provide for their family. That is why in my first year as chair of the Labor, HHS, Education Subcommittee, I created the Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants Program.

Community colleges are, and have always been, the best positioned to support local workforce development. What is needed is more action on our part to nurture this mutually beneficial relationship. We must also continue our investments in the Federal Registered Apprenticeship Program which can help community colleges build their capacity to integrate these initiatives with their credit-bearing degree program. Individuals who complete a registered apprenticeship program earn $200,000 more over the course of their careers compared to workers in the same occupations trained through other means.

As appropriators, we have an obligation to ensure that resources are available for these programs to be successful. You will hear from our witnesses today about the importance of Federal investments in their success, and they will also share the urgent needs in areas where our subcommittee can support students, workers, and regional economy.

Several of our witnesses will also discuss their enthusiasm for workforce Pell Grants, which will allow students to use Pell Grants for noncredit programs as brief as eight weeks. While I will fully expect community colleges to rise to the challenge, and craft programs that meet the needs of workers in regional economies, I have also held longstanding concerns about the potential proliferation of low-quality offering, particularly by the predatory for-profit college sector.

The data on very short-term programs are already quite clear. A Brookings Institute study found that 70 percent of graduates from 10-week programs earn less than they would have if they never enrolled in the program in the first place.

As we review how workforce Pell is implemented, I believe we need to tread carefully. We need to establish strong performance guardrails, and prevent predatory online and for-profit companies from taking advantage of job seekers and taxpayers.

I am proud that during this appropriations cycle, Democrats were able to push back and prevent many of these programs from being eliminated entirely, which is no mean feat when the current administration is trying to dismantle the Education Department altogether.

The Trump Administration slated many investments in community colleges for elimination, including training grants for adults and youth, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), registered apprenticeship, and childcare access grants for student parents. In addition, the President's budget proposed cutting the maximum Pell Grant by $1,685, a nearly 25 percent reduction.

Proudly, on a bipartisan, bicameral basis, the Congress rejected these proposed cuts and eliminations, because unlike the Trump Administration, we recognized the value of community colleges and the Federal programs that they rely on.

Community colleges generate an incredible value to our society and to our economy. In fact, one out of every 18 jobs in the United States is supported by the activities of community college alumni, and community colleges generate nearly $900 billion in economic activity annually. That is according to a report from the American Association of Community Colleges. This is roughly four percent of our national gross domestic product (GDP).

Community colleges are worth the investment, not just economically and socially, but morally. We have an obligation to support affordable, higher education that offers every individual the opportunity to learn, to grow, to succeed, and to thrive.

I want to say a thank you again to our witnesses for all the work that you do for making a difference in the lives of your students. I look forward to hearing your testimony today. I yield back.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, Ms. DeLauro. We will now turn to our witnesses. You will each have five minutes to deliver your opening remarks. Note that your submitted written testimony will be included in the full record. Dr. Sims, we will begin with you. Thank you.

Ms. SIMS. Good morning again, Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am Dr. Patricia Sims, President of Drake State Community and Technical College in Huntsville, Alabama. Thank you for allowing

me to speak on behalf of students and families whose futures depend on decisions that you make in rooms like this one.

Drake State is a Historically Black Community College, an HBCC, founded in 1961. For more than six decades, we have been a doorway of opportunity for students who often have nowhere else to turn. Across the Alabama Community College System, HBCCs served nearly 10,000 students last year from rural and urban communities, first-generation homes, and working-class families.

These students are not just statistics, these are young parents, balancing childcare and course work. They are veterans reentering civilian life. They are adult learners returning to school after years in jobs that no longer sustain their families. They are dreamers looking for opportunity.

At Drake State, we see those struggles up close, and our average student age is 28 years old, managing bills, family responsibilities, and jobs that do not cover the cost of living. Many of the students that we see are hesitant to pursue further education because they fear taking on more debt. For this reason, at Drake State, we do not participate in the Federal loan program. We are committed to providing students a pathway to a better life without burdening them with long-term financial obligations. That is why our industry-supported earn-and-learn programs are so critical. They do more than just prepare students for the workforce, they restore dignity, confidence, and belief in what is possible in America.

Let me share one example. A young man named Andrew walked onto our campus a few semesters ago carrying more than his backpack. He carried two part-time jobs, a young family, and the weight of believing his future was slipping away. Traditional education did not fit his life. Through our CSI, Connecting Students to Industry Program, he spent two days a week in class, and three days a week working in industry earning while he was learning. His supervisors mentored him and invested in him, and two years later, Andrew graduated debt-free and accepted a full-time job with stability and pride. He shared with us, "Drake State didn't just change my future, it changed the way my children look at me." That is the power of targeted Federal support. That is the power of our community colleges. That is the power of opening doors for students who simply need an opportunity.

Partnerships like CSI–Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME), and our Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN) Launch Program with Huntsville Hospital, along with support from organizations like Thurgood Marshall College Fund show what is possible when education and industry work hand-in-hand.

As I close, I would like to speak to a few key Federal initiatives. First, the Strengthening Community College Training Grant Program. This program has had a direct, positive impact on my institution and other Alabama community colleges, and it is a prime example of how government strengthens the workforce by supporting local partnerships.

Secondly, the new Workforce Pell Program. This program will allow institutions like Drake State to expand short-term, high-demand training, and be more responsive to our industry partners. We believe that the department is doing—is implementing this new

authority effectively, and we continue and urge your continued support.

For the Broader Pell Grant Program, we urge you to maintain full funding. The growth and expenditures reflect the bipartisan policy improvements that were enacted under President Trump in 2020. Those changes expanded eligibility and opened the doors for more students in our Nation to access these funds. Those commitments were promises to America's learners, and we feel like those promises should be kept.

Finally, I want to emphasize the critical importance of Title III and Future's Act funding for Historically Black Community Colleges and Universities. This institutional support strengthens every corner of my campus. It helps us to break cycles of poverty, improve workforce readiness, grow local and national economic development, and strengthen America's global competitiveness.

Members of the subcommittee, thank you for your leadership, and thank you for recognizing that the strength of our Nation begins with the strength of its people. With your continued support at Drake State, we will continue to do what we have always done, transform lives one student, one family, and one employer at a time. Thank you for listening and the opportunity to share my comments.

[The information follows:]

Preparing for the Future: America's Community College

Testimony Before
Labor HHS Appropriations Subcommittee

United States House of Representatives

March 4, 2026

Patricia Sims, Ed.D.
President
Drake State Community & Technical College

Good morning Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the Subcommittee.

My name is Patricia Sims, and I proudly serve as the President of Drake State Community & Technical College in Huntsville, Alabama (Drake State). I want to thank the Subcommittee for this opportunity to share my insights and highlight the return on investment that Drake State has demonstrated, both locally and regionally, in workforce development, public-private partnerships, and student success.

Evidence of Success

J.F. Drake State Community and Technical College is a Historically Black Community College (HBCC) located in Huntsville, Alabama, with a rich history rooted in providing technical and vocational education to the region. Drake State Community and Technical College demonstrates the transformative potential of industry partnerships. We have developed proven models that blend strong industry engagement with a student-centered

approach. By incorporating employer input, these models quickly adapt to evolving market demands, ensuring they meet the needs of today's workforce. They highlight the role of community and technical colleges as key economic drivers while delivering measurable, result-oriented workforce outcomes.

Drake State offers extensive work-based learning and apprenticeship programs that connect students directly with Alabama employers. Students gain hands-on experience through these programs, including registered apprenticeships that provide structured, employer-led training. For example:

1) **Huntsville Hospital LPN Launch Program**

The LPN Launch Program was launched as a public/private partnership designed to meet the growing need for practical nursing to support the growth in North Alabama. The program is a unique example of how business and industry should partner with community colleges to meet workforce needs. Students enrolled in the program become Licensed Practical Nurses after three semesters. Industry provides support for students during training, including tuition, books, fees, and the opportunity to apprentice. In return, students agree to a three-year work commitment. This deeper investment in student training results in an employee who can seamlessly transition into the work environment.

This program is being scaled to meet the demand for registered nurses. It has received statewide and national recognition as a successful model for addressing the nursing shortages while providing accessible career pathways.

2) **NASA/MSFC**

Drake State launched its partnership with NASA in 2020 when it became the first and only Historically Black Community College in the nation to win a Cooperative Agreement Notice (CAN) since the program's inception in 2013. The agreement launched Drake State into the research arena in support of the Moon to Mars Project. Specifically, students were exposed to 3D printing technologies and were trained to support additive manufacturing technologies.

Drake State continues its strong relationship with NASA. It is currently home to the PUNCH Initiative (Postsecondary schools United with NASA to Create Hardware) program. PUNCH is a project-based learning program for students to learn skills by designing and fabricating valued products for NASA.

Advancing Debt-Free Education

Debt-free technical education fundamentally changes students' economic trajectories, allowing them to purchase homes, start families, and invest in their communities' years earlier than peers burdened with loan payments. As President of Drake State, my goal is to expand access to debt-free education and training. Drake State serves a unique population. Our average age is 28, and over 93% of our students seek aid to attend school. Many students come to us already with some experience in higher education and student loan debt.

My goal is to put them on a path to gainful employment without further indebting them. The key to success is reimagining how business and industry partner with community

colleges to meet the collective goal of developing a skilled workforce. This journey can start in high school through Dual Enrollment courses.

Dual enrollment has been one of the mechanisms to reach students at an earlier age, exposing them to industry-driven, college-level material. There are over 40,000 students currently enrolled in dual enrollment in Alabama, and 46% of those dual enrollment students are from rural areas.

Since 2015, the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) colleges have experienced a 230% increase in DE students, and we only expect this number to continue to climb higher as more students and families are aware of the benefits and education possibilities these programs provide, also creating a faster pathway for pursuing a career in the workforce.

Strengthening partnerships between industry and community colleges represents a transformative solution to three critical challenges facing American workers and employers: the skilled workforce shortage, rising student debt, and the disconnect between education and employment. By expanding proven models that eliminate student loan debt while developing job-ready talent, we can create sustainable pathways to economic mobility and address pressing workforce needs.

Conclusion

The question is not whether industry should deepen partnerships with community colleges, but how quickly we can scale proven models.

Drake State Community and Technical College and similar institutions have demonstrated what's possible when industry, education, and community commit to developing talent through partnerships that work. The path forward requires expanding these successes from innovative exceptions to standard practice, ensuring that debt-free technical education with guaranteed employment becomes accessible to all students seeking middle-class careers. I appreciate your support for Workforce Pell, which will support our efforts and allow us to strategically partner with industry to identify and invest in areas of need. Request ongoing support of HBCUs/HBCCs as we continue to do our part to support national priorities, even though we do so with aging facilities, beleaguered faculty, and small but mighty teams.

Again, I greatly appreciate this opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you. Dr. Hall.

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Congressman Zinke for the very kind introduction and your partnership over the years. Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity for me to testify today. Okay. Hello. My name is Brad Hall. I serve as the eleventh president of Blackfeet Community College (BFCC). Our BFCC as I will mention for time is in Browning, Montana, and over its 50-year history, we have served the Blackfeet Nation. The BFCC is a tribally-controlled, land-grant institution rooted in Blackfeet culture, and values and stand as a cornerstone of the Federal trust responsibility that the U.S. government has to Tribes. We provide accessible high-quality education to students across the Blackfeet Nation and beyond.

When it comes to size and impact, we are small, but we are mighty. In the fall, we registered 362 students at a 14 percent increase over the last year. We succeed because we offer a welcoming, supportive environment with a 13-to-1 student faculty ratio and low tuition just at 36,000—$3,600 a year for the entire academic year. We also do not serve Federal loans, as we do not want to saddle our students with debt as they transition into the workforce or other universities.

Access is about more than tuition. Sixty-seven percent of our students received Pell Grants. Many balance work, family, community responsibilities, while pursuing their education. That is why we pair financial aid with paid internships, emergency assistance, and strong student supportive services that remove barriers that often prevent completion.

Our programs are tightly aligned to the workforce needs of our Tribal communities. Our industry trades certificates equip students with central building trade skills that directly address regional labor shortages. It is also a key dual-enrollment program that we offer at the college.

Our nursing program assists in workforce gaps in healthcare. Our Class Seven Teacher Certification Program helps educators to teach our culture and language in local schools. Our programs in legal studies and anthropology also strengthens governance and active resource stewardship.

Partnerships amplify this work. For example, we have entered into an agreement with both Glacier National Park in pursuit of the East Glacier Park Lodge, where this summer they will be providing four internships: gardening, engineering, culinary arts, and hotel management. These partnerships are the groundwork for the future of hospitality and tourism programming tied to meaningful careers that we intend on leaning into as a community college.

This impact of this work is measurable. A recent economic study found by the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) found that for fiscal year 2022–2023, Tribal college alumni generated $3.8 billion in economic impact nationwide—the equivalent to supporting over 400,000 jobs.

At BFCC alone, our alumni have contributed $15 million to the reservation economy, the equivalent of supporting 391 jobs. That means that every dollar invested in Blackfeet Community College, students gain $5.20 in lifetime earnings, and Montana taxpayers,

gain $3.5 million in additional tax revenue and in public sector savings. That is not just a good investment, it is a transformational one.

The Pell Grant program is foundational. We are grateful to Congress that acted to prevent near-term shortfalls and maintain a maximum award for fiscal year 2026. We respectfully ask that we continue the Pell Grant program and avoid eligibility challenges that would restrict access.

Also Title III, these are really important because they support everything from scientific equipment, to tutoring, to the very facilities that we operate under. I also want to stress the importance of the Native American Career and Technical Education Program which supports key specialty areas of our local economy, provide the career center that helps students find employment readiness after graduation.

Finally, I want to highlight one urgent opportunity. We need a modern facility for our industry trades program, a new space where specialized stations for carpentry, welding, and others would allow us to expand our current one-year certificate into stackable two-year pathways to additional licensure programs.

In closing, thank you for including the Tribal Colleges among the witnesses at this important hearing. Blackfeet Community College remains committed to working collaboratively with this subcommittee to ensure that Tribal nations and citizens have a voice in shaping our education, our workforce, and our future. I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The information follows:]

Written Testimony of Dr. Brad Hall, President, Blackfeet Community College
Submitted to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
For the hearing titled: Preparing for the Future: America's Community Colleges

Filed: February 24, 2026

Introduction. Blackfeet Community College (BFCC), a Tribally controlled, Land-Grant institution in Browning, Montana, provides accessible, high-quality education rooted in Blackfeet culture and values. Accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, BFCC offers in-person and online programs that support academics, workforce development, cultural preservation, and lifelong learning for all students across the Blackfeet Nation and beyond.

When it comes to size and impact, BFCC is small but mighty! For our Fall 2025 semester, we enrolled 362 students, a 14% increase above our Fall 2024 enrollment. We succeed in large part because we offer students a welcoming, supportive environment with a 13:1 student-to-faculty ratio paired with very affordable tuition: just $3,610 for the entire academic year.

BFCC is deeply committed to advancing Tribal and rural prosperity by eliminating the financial, academic, and health and wellness barriers students face. Because 67% of our students receive federal Pell Grants, a core strategy is to provide paid internships and emergency aid to directly alleviate financial hardship and prevent enrollment loss.

Successes: Workforce Development and Career and Technical Education Paired With Industry and Community Partnerships Creates Significant Positive Economic Impacts.

BFCC's key programs that directly lead to employment include the Industry Trades certificate (and planned pathways), which equips students with essential skills for the building trades and directly addresses regional labor gaps; Nursing, which responds to persistent shortages in the health sector; Class 7 Teacher Certification, which prepares local educators to serve in Tribal and

rural schools; and programs in Legal Studies and Anthropology, which strengthen Tribal governance and natural resource stewardship. By concentrating on these critical areas, BFCC is effectively laying a robust foundation for strong, self-reliant economic growth in the region.

All of BFCC's programs of study are aligned with the demonstrated needs of our local community, workforce opportunities and cultural revitalization efforts. These combined efforts guide the future development of the college to enhance access to trades, job placement and emerging economic trends of the Blackfeet Nation and our expanding service area, through a strong emphasis on hybrid, land-based and experiential learning.

BFCC has entered into a paid internship agreement with community employers and non-profit organizations. A recent example is with Pursuit, which is providing summer project-based paid internships for BFCC students at the East Glacier Park Lodge, focusing on gardening, engineering, culinary, and hotel management. This partnership will also be instrumental in the college's future development of hospitality and tourism programs that connect students to meaningful career-aligned employment opportunities.

All of these successes for individual students add up to significant financial benefits for the local community, the state economy, and the nation as a whole. In September of 2025, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) published an economic study highlighting the impact of Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). The study, titled: *Building Local Economies of Scale: The Impact of Tribal Colleges & Universities in Rural America*, found that in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-2023, TCU alumni accounted for $3.8 billion in economic impact across the country – the equivalent of supporting 40,732 jobs nationwide. Looking only at BFCC's impact during that same period, the study found that our alumni contributed $15 million to the Blackfeet Indian Reservation economy – the equivalent of supporting 391 jobs. For every $1.00 spent on

BFCC, students gain $5.20 in lifetime earnings, U.S. taxpayers gain $1.02 in additional tax revenue and public sector savings, society gains $2.90 in additional income and social savings, and Montana taxpayers gain $3.5 million in additional tax revenue and public sector savings. Not a bad return on investment!

The important role of the Pell Grant Program, Title III, and NACTEP. BFCC's student body is 61% full-time students and 39% part-time students, and 67% of our students receive federal Pell grants. Without the federal Pell grant program, the opportunities we provide would be out of reach for most of our students. We applaud Congress for using the One Big Beautiful Bill Act to appropriate additional funding to the Pell grant program to prevent a near-term shortfall and for creating a new category of Pell grant we are excited to participate in: Workforce Pell. We would also especially like to thank this Subcommittee and your Senate counterparts for keeping the maximum Pell grant award level in place for FY 2026. **Going forward, we ask that you appropriate additional funding to shore up the Pell grant program for the long term, while refraining from making any eligibility changes that would limit access.** For example, some of the changes proposed this past summer to increase the credit hour eligibility threshold for part-time and full-time students would have been devastating to our students, many of whom are already balancing significant work and family obligations while going to school, and are simply not in a position to take on more credit hours just to qualify for Pell.

The Title III - Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities, parts A and F, funds are some of the most flexible and important funds TCUs receive each fiscal year. Title III funds can be used for everything from scientific equipment, to facility construction, to student tutoring, to library books. Because TCUs operate on such limited budgets, largely without any endowments, wealthy alumni networks, or state support to speak of, any interruption, reduction, or delay in

these funds would be devastating. If, for some reason, our Title III funds were to disappear, every single TCU would have to close its doors. **We would like to thank this Subcommittee and your Senate counterparts for appropriating strong, consistent Title III funding in FY 2026, and we ask that this continue in FY 2027.**

While the Native American Career and Technical Education Program (NACTEP) is not specifically for TCUs, we are among the eligible entities, and especially here at BFCC, NACTEP plays an outsized role in our students' success. Our current NACTEP Program supports students enrolled in the following programs of study: AS Hydrology, One Year Certificate in Records Management and AS in Blackfeet Legal Studies. This program provides funding for faculty, comprehensive student support services, and operates a Career Center to support employment readiness upon graduation. We are evolving this program in our new application to provide similar services for our Nursing BSN program, One-year Certificate in Industry Trades and Class 7 Teacher Certification, which develops local educators to become state-certified to teach the Blackfeet Culture and Language as local schools advance language immersion and cultural programs. **We would like to thank this Subcommittee and your Senate counterparts for appropriating strong, consistent NACTEP funding in FY 2026, and we ask that this continue in FY 2027.**

Challenges. BFCC has operated on the funding that we receive primarily from the Department of the Interior, Department of Education, and the Department of Agriculture as a 1994 Land Grant Institution. Over the last year, our campus has faced significant uncertainty due to shifts in federal funding and administrative policies. Any uncertainty or delay in funding, as witnessed over the last year, directly undermines our college's ability to maintain the consistency of

programs and services, ensure employees jobs are protected, and continue to grow our campuses to meet the evolving needs of the "Universal Community" we serve.

All TCU's are open enrollment institutions, any student who wants to, can attend a Tribal College; this is what makes us important drivers of economic, inclusive prosperity to residents in our states and the regions we serve. TCU's remain chronically underfunded, compared to other institutions of higher education in our states and among other Land-Grant Institutions. Our colleges stand as anchors for opportunity in rural and underserved regions where, in many cases, we are the only institution of higher education within hundreds of miles. Continued and increased funding opportunities will enhance what we already do and also fulfill our obligations to our tribal nations, one student success at a time.

Opportunities. BFCC urgently needs a modern facility for our Industry Trades Program to ensure student success and meet regional workforce demand. The new space would include specialized workstations for carpentry, welding, plumbing, and electrical work, along with essential hands-on materials such as lumber, piping, and wiring. This investment will expand the current one-year certificate into stackable two-year pathways, offer additional licenses, and provide practical training that drives local economic growth. By producing qualified, skilled labor to fill critical roles, this facility will reduce reliance on outside contractors, close workforce gaps, and empower graduates to secure well-paying careers, thereby strengthening the region's long-term economic stability and self-sufficiency.

Conclusion. Thank you for including TCUs among the community college witnesses for this important hearing. BFCC remains committed to working collaboratively with the Subcommittee as a trusted resource to ensure that Tribal Nations and Tribal citizens have a say in shaping their education and their future.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you. Mr. Jyotishi.

Mr. JYOTISHI. Thank you very much. Yes, that is right. Good morning, and thank you very much, Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the committee for the privilege of speaking with you today about the critical role of community colleges in preparing for our future. My name is Shalin Jyotishi. I am the founder and managing director of the Future of Work and Innovation Economy Initiative at New America where we advance research and technical assistance to ensure that tech-driven growth translates into economic security for workers and families. Community colleges are critical to that objective.

As you know, our community colleges enroll more than 40 percent of all of our undergraduates, and a majority of them come from low-income families. Through industry-aligned workforce programs, from apprenticeships to work-based learning, the career and technical education, they provide affordable and accessible pathways into the jobs that power our Main Street, healthcare, public safety, skilled trades, information technology (IT), and beyond.

Rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies have meant that today our community colleges are educating for a much more complicated labor market. They are becoming upskilling hubs for adults and entry points for new talent to secure jobs in sunrise industries and advanced tech sectors—AI is one—but biotech, quantum, microelectronics, robotics, and advanced manufacturing.

Now, this is critical because more than half of America's community colleges—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workers need some education beyond high school, but not necessarily a university degree. Unfortunately, too many colleges are shouldering this training responsibility facing chronic under investment. Community colleges receive significantly less public funding per student than four-year counterparts. Now, if we expect our colleges to deliver quality outcomes in our most complex and rapidly-changing industries, they need capacity building investments to purchase the latest equipment, to upskill their own instructors, to level up partnerships with industry, universities, our national labs, and with economic developers.

A few years ago, New America partnered with the National Science Foundation (NSF) to launch the accelerator for community colleges in the innovation economy. This is a national capacity-building program that supports colleges in regions experiencing tech-based growth, from North Dakota Tribal colleges around smart agriculture to Forsyth Tech in North Carolina around bio economy. It is a privately-funded initiative and is supported by national partners who represent our governors, our mayors, our universities, our economic developers, and yes, our community college sector as a whole.

Through the accelerator, we have learned a great deal, and I have shared those insights in my written testimony. Today, the Department of Education and Labor are well-positioned to scale capacity-building supports for colleges, to grow these advanced tech sectors and meet bipartisan aims from expanding economic opportunity, to bolstering national security, to advancing rural development.

As I indicated in my written testimony, specific levers include the Strengthening Community College Training Grants and the Perkins Nation Activities Allocation, that could be leveraged for the same. I also encourage deeper collaborations with our Federal agencies on the leading edge of research and development (R&D), and economic development, including the NSF, the Defense Advanced Research ProjectsAgency (DARPA), and the Departments of Energy, Commerce, Agriculture, and others.

Now I only had five pages, but I provided details for both the capacity building priorities and citations of a few programs that could benefit from more interagency coordination.

In this moment of rapid technological change, our community college sector is best positioned to ensure that low-income students and working adults alike are not left behind. From red States to blue States, from cities to farmlands, with the right investments and strategies engaging all of the agencies at play, we can unlock even more community college pathways to the future of work and the American Dream.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify on this critical topic of preparing for our future, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The information follows:]

NEW AMERICA

Strengthening Community Colleges for Advanced and Emerging Industries and the American Dream

Testimony of Mr. Shalin Jyotishi

Founder & Managing Director, Future of Work & Innovation Economy Initiative, New America

Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

March 4, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the Committee, for the privilege to speak with you about the vital role community colleges play in preparing for the future and expanding access to economic security, the American middle class, and the American Dream.

My name is Shalin Jyotishi, and I lead the Future of Work & Innovation Economy initiative at New America. Our mission is to ensure that technological innovation and tech-based economic development translate into economic security for American workers and their families. Community colleges are central to that mission.

Our nation's more than 900 community colleges enroll about 40% of all undergraduate students. They disproportionately serve low-income students: Nearly 57% of their students come from households earning below 200% of the federal poverty level.[1] Through apprenticeships and work-based learning, career and technical education, and other workforce credentials, community colleges offer affordable, accessible, and industry-aligned pathways to the jobs that keep our communities running in healthcare, public safety, skilled trades, manufacturing, IT, and more.

[1] https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R45686.pdfrunning

NEW AMERICA

But increasingly, rapid advances in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence have meant that community colleges must prepare students for a much more complex labor market. From coast to coast, colleges are expanding training programs focused on AI,[2] biotechnology,[3] microelectronics,[4] energy innovation, and advanced manufacturing to promote economic development and meet industry needs.

More than half of America's 36 million STEM workers belong to the "skilled technical workforce," meaning they need education beyond high school, but not necessarily a bachelor's degree.[5] Community colleges are critical to educating this population. These workers tend to outearn peers with similar levels of education in non-STEM sectors, and they represent a bedrock of America's middle class and our key to continued and expanded economic prosperity and standard of living.

But community colleges are facing this responsibility while contending with long-standing underinvestment. Despite their focus on serving low-income students, they receive much less public funding per student compared to four-year institutions.[6] If we expect our community colleges to deliver strong workforce outcomes in our most advanced industries and during this period of accelerated technological change, they will need targeted and strategic investments to position them for success.

In September 2024, New America partnered with the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) to launch the Accelerator for Community Colleges in the Innovation Economy. A first-of-its-kind effort to provide capacity-building technical assistance to

[2] https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/whats-new-in-ai-focused-skilled-technical-workforce-education/
[3] https://www.forbes.com/sites/shalinjyotishi/2022/11/10/biotechnology-industry-gets-a-boost-from-community-college-degrees/
[4] https://micronanoeducation.org/about/
[5] https://ncses.nsf.gov/pubs/nsb20245
[6] https://www.ccdaily.com/2025/10/datapoints-revenue-by-source/

community colleges located in regions where tech-based economic development is concentrated. It is funded by private philanthropy and supported by a national network representing governors, mayors, businesses, community college presidents and trustees, workforce development boards, and research universities.[7] Drawing on our analysis and direct work with colleges, I offer the following recommendations for the committee to better leverage the Department of Education (ED) and the Department of Labor (DOL) to build community colleges for advanced and emerging technology industries:

First, ED and DOL should be given the resources and mandate to deepen collaboration with federal agencies advancing R&D and economic development in emerging technology areas of national interest,[8] including the National Science Foundation, Department of Commerce, Department of Energy, the White House Office of Science & Technology Policy, and other agencies.[9] These collaborations should focus on **a)** identifying the sectors aligned with national priorities, including national security and rural development; **b)** identifying the regions of priority for capacity-building investments, given ongoing federal and private sector activity; and **c)** coordinating relevant workforce funding opportunities for community colleges.

These actions would align with the administration's AI Action Plan, which has already called for Departments of Labor, Education, Commerce, and the NSF to "prioritize AI skill development as a core objective of education and workforce funding streams."[10] For illustration, the NSF's Advanced Technological Education (ATE)

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[7] https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/press-releases/nsf-and-new-america-announce-strategic-initiative-to-empower-community-and-technical-colleges/ ; https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/empowering-community-colleges-partnerships-for-economic-development-and-indeffectivelyfirst fiveustrial-policy/

[8] https://www.nsf.gov/focus-also areas/technology

[9] Including the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health, and the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Infrastructure.

[10] https://dcjournal.com/how-community-colleges-can-realize-the-promise-of-ai-action-plan/

program has generated many best practices in community college capacity-building for advanced industries. NSF ATE funds the National Applied AI Consortium led by Miami Dade College, Houston Community College, and Maricopa Community College District. This consortium has partnered with Microsoft, Google, Intel, OpenAI, and other leading tech companies to support nearly 2,000 faculty and staff across more than 300 community colleges spanning 49 states to scale AI education.[11] There is much DOL and ED can learn and scale in collaborating with agencies closest to R&D and tech-based economic development,[12] as as part of this mandate, they should report their collaborations back to Congress for further evaluation and refined coordination.

Second, DOL and ED should be given the resources to accelerate community college capacity-building in advanced and emerging industries. DOL's Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants (SCCTG) program would be a good existing funding vehicle.[13] An expanded, targeted allocation for colleges focused on advanced and emerging industries and in regions poised to see the most tech-based growth would go a long way. Additionally, the Carl D. Perkins National Activities appropriation could also be harmonized with SCCTG funding to achieve this goal. Priorities for capacity-building investments include, but are not limited to:

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[11] https://www.forbes.com/sites/shalinjyotishi/2026/02/25/openai-google-microsoft-intel-bet-on-community-colleges-for-ai-talent/

[12] https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/energy-department-funds-first-iacs-at-community-colleges-trade-unions/; https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/nsf-funding-fuels-workforce-innovation-at-community-colleges/; https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/edas-stem-talent-challenge-grants-workforce-funding-for-the-innovation-economy/ ; https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/nsf-epiic-funds-community-colleges-capacity-building-and-innovation/ ; https://www.forbes.com/sites/shalinjyotishi/2025/01/15/work-based-learning-for-emerging-technologies-and-advanced-industries/ ;

[13] https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/skills-training-grants/scc



- Modernizing colleges' data infrastructure to better leverage labor market information in studying industries, jobs, and skills that are rapidly changing;
- Procuring industry-standard equipment and teaching tools necessary to deliver high-quality education and training for our advanced and emerging tech sectors;
- Establishing a sustainable and systematic process to upskill instructors, so they can stay current with the frontier skills associated with cutting-edge technologies;
- Strengthening grants infrastructure to better leverage public and private capital and to effectively partner with industry and universities on tech-based economic development initiatives, such as the NSF's Regional Innovation Engines program and the Commerce Department's Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs;
- Scaling work-based learning with employers and industry intermediary organizations to scale registered apprenticeships, youth apprenticeships, internships, micro-internships, and project-based learning in advanced sectors;
- And improving workforce collaboration approaches with research universities, industry, and R&D organizations, including our national laboratories, ManufacturingUSA Institutes, and other federally funded R&D centers.[14]

Across red states and blue states, community colleges have always been at the forefront of serving our most low-income students. With strategic and coordinated capacity-building investments, they can help further realize the promise of economic security and the American Dream during this period of rapid technological change.

[14] https://ncses.nsf.gov/resource/master-gov-lists-ffrdc

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, and last, but certainly not least, Mr. Morgan from Bevill State.

Mr. MORGAN. Good morning, Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. It is truly an honor to represent the Alabama Community College System and Bevill State Community College, and to speak on a topic that we care very deeply about which is preparing the future workforce of the United States of America.

In Alabama, our community college system includes 24 colleges serving more than 160,000 individuals annually. We contribute over $8 billion to our State's economy every year. More important than economic numbers is this reality. For thousands of Alabamians, especially in rural communities, community colleges are not just the most affordable option, we are often the only accessible option.

At Bevill State Community College, we serve some of the most rural counties in northwest Alabama; cities such as Jasper, Sumiton, Fayette, Hamilton, and Carrollton. Nearly half the population in our service area live in rural communities. Yet despite that geography, and maybe even perhaps because of it, we are delivering results, and these results are not accidental. They are the product of alignment; alignment with industry, alignment with workforce demand, and alignment with the realities of working adults.

Nationally, we know that more than one million trade jobs remain unfilled. In rural America, that shortage can feel even more urgent. Retirements are outpacing replacements. Generational skill transfer is absolutely at risk. At Bevill State, we focus on speed, quality, and flexibility. We offer short-term, industry-recognized credentials in welding, industrial maintenance, construction trades, commercial driving licenses (CDL), heating, ventilation, and air condition (HVAC) fast-track programs that move students from enrollment to employment in a matter of weeks, not years. Students can enter quickly, earn wages quickly, stack credentials over time that can lead to higher degrees. That is the community college model at its best.

We are also building the next-generation pipeline of dual enrollment. Across Alabama, more than 40,000 high school students are earning college credit while still in high school. That is a 230 percent increase since 2015. Just at Bevill State, our dual enrollment has grown more than 130 percent in just the last four years.

In rural counties where opportunity may appear limited, dual enrollment can change trajectories. It allows students to see themselves as college students or even as future skilled professionals earlier than ever before. Now I believe that we stand in a transformational moment. The forthcoming workforce Pell Grant has the potential to remove one of the greatest barriers facing working adults, which is access to financial aid for short-term, high-quality workforce programs.

At Bevill State, workforce Pell could, immediately, expand access to CDL, HVAC fast track, welding, line worker training, healthcare technical certificates, programs that are already often 8 to 15 weeks long. For rural communities, that is just not tuition assist-

ance, that is economic survival. That means helping us stabilize our hospitals. It means expanding energy infrastructure, strengthening manufacturing, and it means putting individuals into family sustaining wages very quickly.

In addition, we are leading the development of the Alabama Energy Infrastructure Training Center and Network. This is a multicampus initiative that will train line workers, fiber technicians, solar and micro-grid installers, electric vehicle (EV) maintenance technicians, HVAC professionals, and weatherization professionals. We are also leveraging additional 50,000 square feet of new training space to create a regional workforce hub focused on high wage, high-demand jobs partnered with industries that are directly tied to national resilience.

When we train local residents for high-skilled infrastructure careers, we strengthen both the rural economy and our national competitiveness. Community colleges are uniquely agile. When employers ask us: can you provide the talent? We must be able to say yes, but not in years, but in months. At Bevill State, agility means rapid curriculum development, employer-informed equipment investments, stackable credentials, and flexible schedules.

Community colleges are the conduit between Federal investment and local impact. We translate policy into jobs filled, wages increased, industry stabilized, communities strengthened. America's community colleges are not simply preparing students for the future, we are preparing the future workforce itself. On behalf of Bevill State Community College and the Alabama Community College System, thank you all for your continued support and for recognizing the essential role community colleges play in America's economic competitiveness.

We stand ready to partner with you, to partner with Congress, to maximize every opportunity, strengthen rural America, and secure our Nation's talent pipeline for generations to come. Thank you so much. I look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]

Testimony of Shawn M. Morgan
Vice President of Workforce & Strategic Initiatives
Bevill State Community College

Preparing for the Future: America's Community Colleges

Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education

March 4, 2026

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the important topic of *Preparing for the Future: America's Community Colleges.* It is an honor to represent the Alabama Community College System and, specifically, Bevill State Community College, which serves students and communities across Northwest Alabama.

The Alabama Community College System (ACCS) is comprised of 24 community and technical colleges serving more than 160,000 individuals annually. Our mission is both educational and economic. We exist to ensure that every Alabamian—regardless of background or geography—has access to high-quality education and workforce training aligned with the needs of industry. Recent economic impact studies show that ACCS institutions contribute over $8 billion annually to Alabama's economy and return measurable public value for every dollar invested. We are not simply institutions of higher learning; we are engines of workforce development and economic mobility.

At Bevill State Community College, that mission is personal. We serve some of the most rural counties in Alabama—across campuses in Jasper, Sumiton, Fayette, Hamilton, and an instructional site in Carrollton. Nearly half of the population in our service region lives in rural communities. For many of our students, we are not just the most affordable option—we are the only accessible option.

And we are delivering results. Our total credit hour production has increased 24% from the 2020-2021 academic year to the 2024-2025 academic year.

Just one of our highlights, our nursing programs consistently demonstrate excellence, with NCLEX pass rates ranging from 95 to 97 percent in recent years . Over the past three academic years alone, Bevill State has graduated more than 1,000 nurses across our ADN/RN and LPN programs —strengthening healthcare systems throughout rural Alabama at a time when staffing shortages threaten hospital viability.

These outcomes are not accidental. They reflect a model built on industry alignment, local partnerships, and agility.

Proven Models: Industry-Driven, Flexible Pathways

Bevill State operates on a simple principle: workforce programs must be employer-informed and student-centered.

We maintain active advisory committees across healthcare, manufacturing, construction, and transportation. These partnerships allow us to rapidly adjust curriculum, equipment, and delivery models to meet real-time labor market demand.

In our region, manufacturing and skilled trades remain foundational to economic stability. Nationally, over one million trade jobs remain unfilled, including 500,000 in manufacturing

alone . That shortage is felt acutely in rural communities like ours, where retirements outpace replacements and generational knowledge is at risk of being lost.

To address this, Bevill State delivers:

- Short-term, industry-recognized credentials in welding (including SMAW, GMAW, and FCAW processes), industrial maintenance, and construction trades
- Commercial Driver's License (CDL) training to support logistics and supply chain needs
- HVAC Fast Track programs that move students from enrollment to employment in a matter of weeks
- Stackable credentials in healthcare that allow entry-level employment with clear pathways toward advanced licensure

Our approach reduces time-to-competency while preserving academic rigor. Students can enter quickly, earn, and return to continue building credentials over time.

Expanding Opportunities

Dual Enrollment and Early Exposure

The ACCS takes a forward-thinking approach by exposing students to industry-driven college level material at an early age. In the 2024-2025 Academic Year, the system served over 40,000 dual enrollment students who were able to simultaneously attend high school and college-level classes. This number represents an even bigger picture with a **230% increase** in enrollment since 2015. At Bevill State, our dual enrollment students have increased over **130%** since the 2020-2021 academic year. While dual enrollment itself is not unique to the ACCS, what makes our programs unique is that we provide low tuition year-round, accessible instructors and resources, lower GPA requirements, and high-quality education opportunities that offer full transferability and academic rigor across all 67 counties in the state of Alabama. Additionally, many of our dual enrollment instructors are local high school teachers credentialed by community colleges, a model that supports K-12 teacher retention and expands instructional capacity statewide. Through dual enrollment, we are providing opportunities to reach those who may not initially see themselves as college-bound, widening the state's talent pipeline and preparing students for in-demand careers.

In rural counties where economic opportunity may appear limited, dual enrollment changes life trajectories.

Workforce Pell Grant – A Transformational Opportunity

The forthcoming Workforce Pell Grant represents one of the most significant federal policy shifts in workforce education in decades. By allowing Pell Grant eligibility for high-quality, short-term programs between 150 and 600 clock hours aligned to high-demand occupations, Congress has the opportunity to remove a major barrier to entry for working adults.

At Bevill State, Workforce Pell would immediately expand access to programs such as CDL, HVAC Fast Track, welding, lineworker training, and healthcare technical certificates. Many of these programs are 8 to 15 weeks in duration—ideal for dislocated workers, underemployed adults, and individuals needing rapid reentry into the workforce.

For rural communities, this is not simply about tuition assistance. It is about economic survival. Workforce Pell can help stabilize hospitals, support energy infrastructure expansion, and fill critical trade shortages—all while providing liveable, family-sustaining wages.

Alabama Energy Infrastructure Training Center & Network (AEITCN)

In response to growing regional demand for skilled energy and infrastructure workers, Bevill State is leading the development of the Alabama Energy Infrastructure Training Center & Network (AEITCN).

This initiative will include expanded training capacity for:

- Lineworker programs supported by a dedicated pole yard
- Fiber connectivity and broadband infrastructure
- Solar / Microgrid installation and maintenance
- Electric vehicle and battery troubleshooting and maintenance
- HVAC and Weatherization training

The AEITCN will leverage existing campus facilities alongside approximately 50,000 square feet of new training space to create a scalable regional workforce hub. The goal is not merely program expansion—it is the creation of a coordinated, multi-campus network capable of responding quickly to industry growth in utilities, energy production, advanced manufacturing, and infrastructure modernization.

Energy security and workforce development are directly linked. By training local residents for high-skill, high-wage infrastructure careers, we strengthen both regional economies and national resilience.

Skills for Success Program: Our **ACCS Innovation Center** developed the "Skills for Success" program, which offers customized, rapid-delivery, non-credit, industry-recognized training in high-demand fields like commercial truck driving (CDL), welding, construction, and healthcare. This program is often offered at **no cost** to the participant, swiftly moving individuals from unemployment or underemployment into family-sustaining careers.

By reducing the time-to-competency, we accelerate the state's ability to attract new industry jobs. What distinguishes this program is its industry-driven design. Businesses identify their specific workforce needs, and we convene a task force of leaders from across that sector to develop the curriculum. Their combined expertise ensures that our training is precisely aligned with current hiring demands and upskilling priorities.

Supporting Rural Communities and Special Populations

Rural access remains central to our mission. Healthcare shortages threaten the viability of small hospitals across our region. Manufacturing employers struggle to replace retiring skilled technicians. Broadband expansion requires trained fiber technicians. The modernization of energy infrastructure requires certified lineworkers.

Our response is community-specific solutions.

We work directly with hospitals, manufacturers, utilities, and economic development authorities to design targeted pipelines. We provide flexible scheduling, hybrid instruction, and supportive services to adult learners who strive to balance work and family responsibilities.

We also recognize that many untapped workers face barriers—whether financial, academic, or proximity. Community colleges are uniquely positioned to meet individuals where they are in life and help them reach new heights.

Agility as Workforce Strategy

The defining strength of community colleges is agility. When employers ask, "Can you provide the talent?" we must be able to answer "Yes"—not in years, but in months.

At Bevill State, agility means:

- Rapid curriculum development
- Employer-informed equipment investments
- Stackable credential design (short-term, long-term or eventual Associates Degree)
- Flexible delivery models
- Partnerships across K-12, industry, and economic development

Community colleges are the "conduit" between federal investment and local workforce impact. We translate policy into practical outcomes—jobs filled, wages increased, industries stabilized, and communities strengthened.

America's community colleges are not simply preparing students for the future—we are preparing the future workforce itself.

On behalf of Bevill State Community College and the Alabama Community College System, I thank you for your continued support and for recognizing the essential role community colleges play in America's economic competitiveness.

We stand ready to partner with Congress to ensure that federal workforce investments—including Workforce Pell—are implemented in ways that maximize opportunity, strengthen rural America, and secure our nation's talent pipeline for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, Mr. Morgan, and all of you, I appreciate your testimony. I will begin our questions and answers, and I would like to begin with Dr. Sims. You talked about in your testimony about your aim is to prepare students for careers without additional burden of debt. How has this conviction and decision as an institution to participating grants and scholarships and not loans led you to set up these creative partnerships with employers to offer cost-effective programs that benefit both the students and the employers?

Ms. SIMS. Thank you for your question, Mr. Chairman. In coming to Drake State, there is a lot of rapid growth in the Huntsville area. Again, the students that we serve are often nontraditional students, adult-age learners. What we keep hearing is that these are the folks that are in—that have not been able to advance their position in work. We have been really, really critical and intentional about partnering with industries when they come to a need—a line—directly aligning training with the requested industry. That gives our industry partners a level of comfort in investing in the student.

What we also find is that our industries are tired of recruiting. When we are investing in people who live in the area, who have committed, who love the area, and who are simply looking for an opportunity to upskill, that offers confidence in the work that we are delivering. Through the Alabama Community College System, our system of colleges, we are very proud of the work that we are able to be responsive, rapidly responsive to the needs of industry. We found that with these partnerships we can find new and creative ways to not further burden students with debt. Most of these look like earn and learn programs. These are individuals who have to work because they do have responsibilities, but they can learn as well. Industry has come to the table. We have been so proud of those partnerships, including our FAME partnerships. An industry has an opportunity to see the students, to train them, and acclimate them into their culture early on. What that means is what we can deliver is a ready to work employee, not a person that has to be on-boarded and retrained, ready to work. We have found great success—and I am really proud of the work that we have been able to do in helping our students improve the quality of their lives and meeting the needs of employers. That is what we feel like our role is as community colleges.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you. Let me turn to you, Mr. Morgan. I think in your testimony, you rightly said that rural communities can face challenges in addressing workforce needs. From nursing to manufacturing, our economic growth depends, in large part, on having enough qualified workers. Can you tell us more about Bevill State's efforts to address the rural workforce needs, and in particular, what successes have you seen in terms of attracting and then retaining students in the local workforce and economy after they graduate?

Mr. MORGAN. Thank you for the question, Mr. Chairman. You know, because—to give you an idea of just the scope of our footprint at Bevill State, our footprint encompasses 4,600 square miles. It is massive. Immediately, there is a challenge, right, which is access, and access is everything. To make our potential students

aware of what is available is a challenge. We are going to make sure that we are—we are in the high schools. We are marking, we are championing what we do to allow them to see what is available. Because within our four campuses and our structural site, we are within pretty good driving distance for anyone that can get there. Because we can have flexible schedules, we can do that in the evenings, on the weekends, online, like you said earlier, we can make that available to them.

What we are doing to address the rural workforce is to make sure, number one, that we are building any program, not out of theory, but out of jobs being hired, right? We do not want to just because of a buzzword or something that sounds good. If employers are hiring, we want to make sure that we are addressing that workforce need and making sure that we are connecting those students to that industry, either through job shadowing, through possibly internships, whatever it may be to let them know that locally, so we can help retain them, there is opportunity for them; give them hope to think that there is not something that they are going to have to move away for, or they are going to look outside of where they have grown up, that there is opportunity locally. We do that by lining with industry—building programs that align with employer demand.

We have got to make that training accessible, and we got to provide flexible schedules by offering short-term credentials. Let us get them a short-term credential, get them employed, and allow that credential to be stackable so if they want to come back for an upskill they can, but let us get them in the workforce. If we can do that, we can help retain them because we are getting them in there early.

Mr. ADERHOLT. My time has slipped away, but let me just ask you quickly, you talking about you got a big coverage area that the campus covers or the college covers. What would be, approximately, the most that a student would have to drive in order to reach one.

Mr. MORGAN. I would say 45 minutes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you. Ms. DeLauro.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, just a couple of things before I ask questions. With regard to Dr. Sims, HBCUs in the budget got a very small increase of $5 million. Title III got an increase of $2 million. The Native American Tech Program is part of Perkins. I might just say—this cannot be deducted from my time—today is the anniversary of Frances Perkins being sworn in as the first woman cabinet member of Franklin Roosevelt. It is a great day. She is a hero. She really is to many of us.

The Strengthening the Community College Training Grants has been flat-funded. The Perkins Grants have been flat-funded. I just mention those things because each of you has reflected on the importance of these things.

Mr. Jyotishi, what is the Federal role in supporting community colleges? We provide student financial assistance, Pell, Federal work study. We fund formula grants, Perkins, Career and Technical Adult, WIOA training, competitive grants, apprenticeships strengthening, community colleges training. What are, in your view, the most effective Federal level for supporting community colleges?

Mr. JYOTISHI. Thank you very much for the question. Representative DeLauro, I would say that the optimal role of the Federal government is to support the infrastructure for institutions, such that they can deliver high-quality, short-term training; such that they can deliver quality degree programs; such that then can expand apprenticeship opportunities; such that they can form these industry partnerships and partnerships with K–12 schools through career technical education.

All of these activities are incumbent on institutions having the resources they need. Again, our universities are immensely valuable assets to this country. It is why America became a global power in the 20th century. There has not been a commiserate focus on supporting our community colleges in the same way. I would love to see the Strengthening Community College Training Grants Program really be expanded to support capacity building of institutions around high-effective practices.

The National Science Foundation has the advanced technological education program, and they have pioneered this Business and Industry Leadership Teams (BILT) model, building industry leadership teams, which is a highly sophisticated way of working with industry partners in STEM sectors. In the traditional advisory committee, industry partners might meet quarterly. With a BILT model, they are voting on each individual knowledge skill and ability from a 12- to 36-month time horizon. They are working with local hiring managers. Strengthening community college training grants and other programs within the Education and Labor Department's purview could really scale that practice across our more than 900 community colleges across this country.

Ms. DELAURO. I wanted to pose this question to everyone, but I waited until later on. Each of you has talked about a quality education. I do not know what your metrics are for success of what is a quality education. What are the evaluations with regard to that? What are the oversight mechanisms for you to make a determination as to whether or not a program is successful, not successful, that it is not providing the individual with the kinds of qualities that you are talking about, or the ability to be able to survive economically because of this thing. I am going to get to that if the Chairman will allow me afterward, but my question to you, Mr. Hall is, it is—you highlight Pell, again the strengthening of Tribal colleges funding, Perkins.

Talk to me a little bit about WIOA, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and its ability to prepare students for the job opportunities in your region. Keeping in mind that WIOA was going to be eliminated, I want to hear from you about WIOA.

Mr. HALL. Thank you for the question. WIOA is a program that supports a lot of Native American people in our State. It is also one of the only opportunities that people coming out of incarceration, coming out of treatment, people that were among the most vulnerable in our population actually benefit from those programs. Our college does not currently have a WIOA program, but the BOXI manpower program does operate a WIOA program, and it provides people with opportunities, not just for employment, but for training. It also eliminates—as we have done as community colleges as the barriers—we look at barriers as one of those things that we

look at, in order to eliminate, in order for that student and their family to have access to higher wages and opportunities for upward mobility. A lot of times, those could be found on the reservation through programs like WIOA because they are partners with the Blackfeet Manpower program. I support that just like the college.

Ms. DELAURO. Okay. We look for your loud and clear voice as we try to proceed to make sure that we cannot only maintain WIOA, but increase the funding for programs like WIOA and some of the others we have talked about. Now, I will just say—let me get to my other question. I guess toward the end I would love to have you think about it, I think since this is an Appropriations Committee, we spend money on these programs. It is important for us to know what—how you define the metric of success and define that quality education program and what are the consequences to the benefit of the youngsters or the—and they are not youngsters. Your folks are average ages, are older, and who have families, et cetera. How are we making life different for them? Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Mr. Simpson.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me get my windsock back on. Thank you. Thank you all for being here. If there is one word I could put to your testimony, it is called passion. You all seem very passionate about community colleges and the job that you do, and you are right. They are an essential part of the education system in this country.

We talked mostly about preparing people for jobs and stuff. You do more than that, though. You prepare students for further education beyond just community college, right? I am going to ask a couple of questions of Dr. Hall, and it might seem a little bit off subject, but they are not really. The reason I ask this is I chair the Interior Subcommittee that funds the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Indian Health Services, Indian Justice, all of those types of things.

One of the things I have been concerned about is I travel around this country and meet with Tribes all over the country. A lot of these reservations are in remote areas and stuff, trying to get doctors, dentists, nurses to go to a hospital on a reservation or a clinic or whatever. How do we get those people back there? How many community colleges are there, Tribal community colleges?

Mr. HALL. There is approximately 36 accredited.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thirty-six.

Mr. HALL. Yes.

Mr. SIMPSON. I always believe the way you are going to do it—and the reason that—being a dentist in a previous life, one of the—I know what debt you get when you get out of dental school and stuff. Going to work on a reservation for public health services or whatever, you are not going to make enough money to pay off your student loans frankly. It is hard to get people out there on the reservation to do these jobs.

I have always believed that the way you are going to solve this problem ultimately is get Tribal members and send them to nursing school, to dental school, to medical school, whatever, because they are more likely to return to their Tribe and help their Tribes out. Is that an accurate assessment do you think?

Mr. HALL. We call it grow our own, and growing your own workforce requires an investment in them to stay in the community, but they need opportunity to garner that education while in the community. We have leveraged a lot of online learning partnerships with partner institutions. University of Montana Western is one of those. Elementary education teachers, we have flooded the market locally in schools with over 100 new teachers over the last seven years. There has been a lot of really important leaning into some of the lessons we learned over the pandemic, and leaning into that online learning apparatus has been really successful in giving them the access that they need to perform those duties in the school. We also have a hybridized nursing program to the point about how far do you go to go to school?

We have a nursing student that comes from Cascade, Montana, 120 miles away from Browning, and the hybridized program works because she can attend the—attend to her duties at home with her family and with her employment there. She can also be on our campus at clinical sites around the State and looking at—and working in our skills lab. In order to do all of that, we need the capabilities which we do have, and through those capabilities, we are also looking at growing our own trade professionals as an aging workforce. We also find value in those aging professionals being a part of that, as mentors, as people in the community that can instill some of those values, the work ethic, and the skills that those individuals need to perform well and make livable wages so that their families can be successful.

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, thank you. Thank you for all that you do—that all of you do. It is very important. I will be up to Montana this summer to visit with you and talk about how we can advance this and stuff. Because it is very important if we are going to address the long-term needs on reservations and stuff. You know the old——

Mr. HALL. I welcome your visit.

Mr. SIMPSON [continuing]. Days of being able to—you all know this—the old days of having a job, going to work, getting a pension, working there for 40 years and retiring are gone anymore. I have always wondered, how is someone in Salmon, Idaho, a town of about 2,000, that is long ways from anywhere—somebody retires, they lose their job, and they need updated skills, how do you even get those? They have got a spouse, three kids, and a mortgage. They cannot just pick up and go to ISU or to Boise State or, you know, to one of our four-year institutions. You guys are filling that role that these people need. I appreciate everything that you do. Thank you for being here today, and I look forward to working with you to solve some of these challenges that we are going to face in the future. Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Mr. Hoyer.

Mr. HOYER. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for having this hearing. I think one thing—I think I can speak for all the committee, well the labor of community colleges are critically important. I have an agenda that I have articulated since 2010 called Make It In America. It comes from the popularity of Made In America that we make things here. I suggest we change

that to Make It In America because Made In America is what we did yesterday.

Make It In America has two meanings: number one, who produced this bottle? Number two, you succeed. You succeed because you have a skill, knowledge that you need to be competitive and job-worthy. I am just going to ask you one question, and I want each one of you to answer it, and I should have asked it a week ago so you had time to think about it. We cut community college funding in half in the House of Representatives in the bill we sent to the Senate. We cut $1.8 billion out of a $3.8 billion budget for fiscal year 2025.

I am interested in knowing—and I think the committee needs to know, if we had, in fact, passed the House bill and it became law and we cut $1.82 billion from a $3.896 billion budget, essentially, perhaps not each one of the institutions cutting them in half, but cutting the resources available across the board in half, what impact would that have had on your ability to make sure that people can make it in America? Start with you, Dr. Sims. Just go right down the line.

Ms. SIMS. Absolutely. Thank you. Thank you for that question. In the State of Alabama, one of the things that we are really struggling with is a nonparticipation rate, right, of number of employees of people who should be working who are not and why are they not working? They are not working because of barriers, such as childcare, transportation, just basic barriers, or not being able to find—have the time to upskill, to access a job, the training that is required for a job for a livable wage, and the support—the nontraditional students that we serve requires a different level of support. It is not our traditional high school student that can just go on a pathway. We have to consider—they are usually one car breaking down, one child sick, missing a class from stopping out. Right.

In addition to the infrastructure that we need, too, that we discussed already to be responsive to industry as it changes so rapidly, we have got to have resources to hire, to retain the talent to train the individuals that need to work. We cannot compete with the industry salaries that we are surrounded with. We have to find creative partnerships with industry to do that. Then we have to then support the students. We really are—we are the liaison to plugging and meeting all of those needs.

The impact of faculty, student support, and infrastructure, all the things in professional development, all those things that we need to deliver, that is all those areas are impacted which is every corner of my campus.

Mr. HOYER. It would have been under mine.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Dr. Hall.

Mr. HALL. Well, let me first start by saying Tribal college students do not get community college funding, but not——

Ms. FRANKEL. Is your mic on?

Mr. HALL. Over the last year, it has been very difficult. Because as a predominantly Federally-funded institution, it is hard to plan when we have uncertainty. It is also very important to note that these delays in Federal funding harm jobs of people that serve our

students, they even harm students' investment in our college, and they are coming to our college as wanting to get ahead in life.

I have small rural institutions where access is pretty much the only place where they can within 200 square miles. These temporary instabilities that have been caused are really, really important, and they have had impact on retention, and they also really hindered, in some cases, student confidence in our institutions.

Am I going to have a program to go to if funding does not come through? Am I going to have a job if I am a faculty or student support staff member who is not going—who makes that their career and their life? These are the things that we have stressed over the last year, and this year has really been tough for Tribal colleges, specifically, because we do not get that additional support. I must say we are also chronically microphone in multiple—many, many areas. One-time funding from Title III is just that. It is one-time funding. Although we were grateful to receive that, and it is at work, we really would like to see that on a more consistent basis, and that the predominant—most of our—a lot of our funds are forward-funded. As we are weighing the scales here in trying to determine what the future of our college looks like, we are very hopeful that workforce Pell will give us a lot of jet fuel to fuel these workforce programs.

The uncertainty and somewhat the instability and decision making about how our colleges are funded, we have to be at the forefront with our colleagues to make sure that we are also represented. Thank you.

Mr. JYOTISHI. Thank you for the question, Representative Hoyer. I think it would be critical, critically detrimental to the opportunities that colleges provide students and workers if their funding were to be cut. The Make It In America, to me, really resonates from the standpoint of expanding access to economic opportunity, but ultimately security.

Our community colleges are really unique because 47.5 percent of us work for small and medium-sized businesses in this country, and community colleges, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, they serve Main Street. They serve the industry partners that power our communities. Without that funding that keeps that infrastructure in place, there is not an ability to deliver on their promise.

Now, I will say, you know, there is also something that to be underscored here around the underserved populations that community colleges help uplift as well: student parents, veterans, returning adults who are coming back from career pivots or needing some upskilling, including in light of changes to the labor market due to AI that is going to increase in the coming years.

I was just in Miami for the National Applied AI Consortium meeting. It was hosted at Miami-Dade College in partnership with Houston Community College and Maricopa Community College District in Arizona.

We had 400 community college leaders who had come together to learn about how to build their capacity to respond to the AI moment that we are facing in many parts of this country. I think it would be critical if those resources were to be lost for these institutions.

Mr. ADERHOLT. If you could briefly—because time is running out, if you could just briefly answer and then we will go on to the next person.

Mr. MORGAN. Yes, Mr. Chairman. I sit here thinking about it. It is not a wonderful thought at all. I am thinking, what on Earth would we cut?

We are stretching everything as thin as we possibly can. We are going out to industry asking for assistance, asking for equipment donations. The equipment to train our students is extremely expensive.

How—if we have these cuts—there is a regional metric that we talk about all the time with Dr. Hagood, our president, which is, for every five individuals leaving the workforce, we have two skilled people to replace them—how could we make that change if we had those funding cuts. I do not know how we would do it. Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Mr. Clyde.

Mr. CLYDE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for appearing in our subcommittee today. I am a huge fan of community and technical colleges. I want you to know that right up front.

I believe community colleges are on the front lines of preparing America's workforce. If we are serious about an America-first agenda, we must ensure that any Federal investment in education actually prepare Americans for good-paying jobs that strengthen our economy and our national security.

Indeed, community colleges across the country are delivering tangible results. We see models rooted in local control, employer alignment, and measurable return on investment.

These colleges are not chasing ideological trends and squandering taxpayer dollars. Instead, they are training nurses, welders, line workers, CDL drivers, and skilled technicians, the very backbone of our national economy.

I would like to recognize one such institution in my own backyard: Lanier Technical College in Gainesville, Georgia. Lanier Tech exemplifies exactly what community colleges can and should be, a direct pipeline from classroom to career for students across northeast Georgia.

I want to congratulate Lanier Tech's president, Tim McDonald, on a remarkable milestone, the establishment of a $1 million privately funded scholarship created in his honor, a testament to the impact that he has had on students and the broader community that he has served so well.

You know, at the same time that we are seeing incredible ROI from community colleges, for decades, Federal higher-education spending in four-year institutions has grown dramatically, saddling students with debt and degrees that do not necessarily translate into jobs.

Taxpayers deserve to know that every dollar appropriated strengthens workforce participation, supports high-demand industries, and enhances American self-reliance, not bureaucracy.

We must focus on what works—State-led initiatives, strong partnerships with employers, flexible pathways like short-term credentials, and apprenticeships, and accountability tied to tangible re-

sults, such as employment rates, wage gains, and filling critical labor shortages in trades, healthcare, manufacturing, and energy.

Dr. Hall and Dr. Sims both, and before we get into the importance of community colleges, I want to ask you something directly relevant to the work that Blackfeet Community College does in serving its students.

If you were not aware, in the Justice Department appropriation, there is a carve-out in the Violence Against Women Act, Campus Grant Program that reserves half of the $25 million of available funding specifically for HBCUs and Tribal colleges like yours.

The amendment actually says $25 million is for grants to reduce violent crimes against women on campus as authorized, of which $12.5 million is for grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities.

If half of the funding is set aside for less than five percent of all colleges, then someone seems to think that there is a violence-against-women issue at these specific types of colleges and universities.

My question to you is, are you seeing a significant increase in violence against women on your campuses? Is that something that—I mean, when you talk to presidents of other colleges like yours, is that something that you are seeing?

I am not seeing that in the news, but I am just—I mean, you would know better than me. Are you seeing anything like that?

Mr. HALL. Based on our Clery data, there is no—nothing in the last three years that I have been president.

Mr. CLYDE. Okay.

Mr. HALL. However, we live in a community that often deals with those matters, those issues——

Mr. CLYDE. Okay.

Mr. HALL [continuing]. And oftentimes, those funnel in to those experiences of those students. Sometimes that lead—those type of things lead to them not continuing on with their education.

On the programmatic side, I know that there is a large need for more law enforcement training, nurse training, especially where sexual assaults are concerned, but also community awareness about how to respond to things like human trafficking and other matters.

Mr. CLYDE. Dr. Sims, are you seeing a large increase in violence against women on your campus?

Ms. SIMS. I have a similar story, that we do not see that—that does not happen on our campus——

Mr. CLYDE. Okay.

Ms. SIMS [continuing]. But we get the residuals of that. Those are the students, they experience those—they have those experiences at home, and so they bring that with them to the campus, and so we do have to support them if they are going to continue their education.

Mr. CLYDE. Okay.

Ms. SIMS. It is not a direct impact, but we have discussed it.

Mr. CLYDE. Okay. Well, thank you. I appreciate that.

Dr. Sims, you made it clear that expanding debt-free technical education is central to changing the economic trajectory of your students, many of whom are working adults.

From your experience at Drake State Community and Technical College, how can we better incentivize industry partnerships that help cover tuition costs or provide work-based learning opportunities so students can complete workforce programs without taking on any additional debt—specifically Federal debt? Although you said that you really do not offer Federal debt, correct?

Ms. SIMS. No, we do not participate in the Federal loan program.

Mr. CLYDE. Right.

Ms. SIMS. We have been able to structure partnerships, and so your support and the continuing strengthening community college programs, your workforce payoff could be tremen—it could be transformational in providing the access that is needed and the metrics that are being set forth whereby workforce payoff, the programs have to align directly with industry need—I mean, should earn the confidence of industry partners and of the public that we are doing the work and we are directly aligning the programs that we are offering with placement.

I heard someone mention what does success look like. It looks like students in jobs, earning wages—not jobs—on career paths——

Mr. CLYDE. Yes.

Ms. SIMS [continuing]. Where they can continue to grow, continue to learn and earn. That is where we land with the funding.

If we continue to support Pell Grant, workforce Pell, fund Pell, because that access is critical for the students that we serve. That is the only way many of the students that we serve will have access to an education.

So—and it is unfair to add additional debt when they have already had that experience and it has not turned out well for them and their families.

Mr. CLYDE. Well, thank you. I agree that additional debt is not something that we want to see them have, so thank you. I yield back.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Ms. Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Pocan, and thank you all for being here.

I live in Palm Beach County. We have a fantastic State college—Palm Beach State College. Ava Parker is a really extraordinary leader. I have done a lot of projects with that college.

I am going to—I have two questions. I am going to ask them both at the same time. If you feel comfortable, you do not have to answer both, but my first question is going to be, if AI and quantum technologies are driving the future economy, how do we make sure that community colleges are equipped to train the workforce at scale, and what Federal investment would move the needle faster? That is going to be my first question.

My second question is, in my county, there is a lot of building of new hospitals, and that is the bricks and the mortars. What I am concerned about and like to know from you is, what is a quality team that a hospital needs, the different professions?

What kind of programs can the community colleges provide to make sure that the workforce is available? Who wants to start?

Mr. MORGAN. I can address the first question possibly. AI is something that certainly is concerning, right? When we are with recruiting students, whether—or nontraditional students, and over the past, and as we have pushed people to get a four-year degree no matter what it is in, that is going to be their path forward.

However, the truth is, AI is coming for those people. We have been telling everybody for 20 years to learn to code. AI is coming for the coders. What we are trying to—what we are trying to make aware to our students, high school and otherwise, AI is not coming for the welders. They are not coming for the steam fitters, the pipe fitters, the electricians, the plumbers. They are not coming for those.

So—and if we look at wages and the demand for these jobs, I mean, you can—it is hard to tell a 20-year-old that is building ships and submarines down in Mobile, Alabama, that is making right at six figures, that is not meaningful to them.

I think what we need to do, and what we are going to continue to do, is educate, make aware, these opportunities are available, and be much aware of what AI could possibly take away from you, because we are seeing that every single day. I think this is certainly something we are going to continue with.

Ms. FRANKEL. Could someone answer the question in terms of what we can do to train people to be ready to use AI and quantum?

Mr. JYOTISHI. Absolutely. Thank you very much for the question, Representative Frankel.

I think this would be an imperative for the Department of Education and the Department of Labor's Perkins Program, the Strengthening Community College Training Grants, and then I would also add into the mix increased focus on the Employer Skills Training Fund, and how the employer strategies can connect back to the community colleges.

I was heartened to see a focus in the recent solicitation from the Department of Labor around meeting AI labor market needs in particular for that program.

I mentioned I was recently in Miami for the National Applied AI Consortium. This is a community by community colleges for community colleges that has really generated some best practices in building out the capacity for community colleges to respond to the AI moment.

They support upskilling of instructors. They support curricula development. I had put together the industry session with OpenAI, Google, Microsoft, and Intel, who have all committed financial resources to the community college sector around AI workforce development.

Community colleges are going to be the vehicle we need in this country to help people not get left behind. There is the upskilling opportunity for incumbent workers, and there is the opportunity to help students who are entering the workforce for the first time.

I had spoken with Jasmine Dora, a graduate of Miami-Dade College's AI program, who was in the very first crop of graduates from Miami-Dade's AI programs, and the stories that she shared about what the community college program afforded her, and students like her, was really inspiring to hear.

In terms of other specific ideas, I mentioned in my testimony that interagency collaborations are an opportunity for appropriators to strengthen links across the government. I point to the Department of Energy's Genesis Mission.

I had met with a delegation of community colleges to think about how community colleges fit into the Genesis Mission at Energy.

The National Science Foundation's Technology, Innovation, and Partnerships Directorate has been doing a lot of outstanding work on AI R&D and innovation programs. We have the Commerce Department and all of the work they are doing there with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

I would encourage more interagency collaborations. That means joint solicitations, technical assistance coordination, as well as strategy coordination across the gamut.

Ms. FRANKEL. All right. Thank you. Two very interesting answers—but thank you both—both valuable. I will have to get the other question answered another time, but thank you so much, very much.

I yield back.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Mr. Pocan.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to our witnesses.

Pell Grants have been a lifeline for students working to earn a college degree. For lower-income students like I was, because I got Pell Grants when I went to college, it provides financial support for essential college costs, including books and equipment, obviously tuition, and other necessary supplies.

At public two-year institutions, Pell can cover a substantial amount of expenses, and studies have shown that government recoups the cost of Pell Grants in only 10 years, because recipients graduate, earn higher wages, pay more taxes, and rely less on services.

Given the increased Pell uptake due to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion, there is projected to be a Pell shortfall. I know it is $5 billion this year, and I was just talking to someone who mentioned it might be $12 billion in the upcoming year.

I have a bill with Education and Workforce Ranking Member Bobby Scott that would expand Pell Grants, but given that shortfall, two questions—and I think, you know, Dr. Hall, you wrote in your remarks about Pell, and I would also like to hear from Dr. Sims and Mr. Morgan, just with the institutions here. Can you share the importance of Pell Grants to your students specifically, how it helps your institution when they have those dollars?

Secondly, what would happen if we do not have some kind of way to make up for that shortfall in Pell Grants?

Dr. Hall.

Mr. HALL. Well, I also commented that without the Pell, a lot of our students would not have basic access to a higher education, to workforce training, to even getting in the door of our college.

We are—it is a high representative number. You know, 67 percent of our students get that.

Now, generationally, that is also an issue because if you get an education and you then have children, they do not qualify for the

same level of access that you do. That does not mean they do not make any more money. It does not mean that they are filthy rich from the opportunities that have been afforded to them.

What it means is that oftentimes, the cost of education defeats the purpose of pursuing one. That is why we, at Blackfeet Community College, subsidize and do not offer loans, and do not provide these additional burdens on students because we know that this is going to be the difference between them completing and getting a job and them not completing and not getting a job in an area that is in high need in our community.

As far as when we issue Pell Grants to students, it allows them to also cover living expenses because they—normally, if you are a full-time student, you are not working full-time. You are not making that full wage. Every little bit helps to allow them to be forward.

On top of Pell Grants, we offer emergency aid. That comes in really good, especially when that car breaks down or you have a laptop malfunction and does not work.

Those are the kind of things that we try and use to keep students going, and those little things really do help in persistence, and they also help in that student having the confidence that they can learn in a classroom, that they have the tools that they can learn.

As we are looking at things like AI, you know, I am talk-—I am in favor of us expanding on that. It is a good tool for instruction. It also is increasing productivity, not just in students, but employees, faculty, saving time.

I really feel like things like the Pell Grant also have a huge impact on students with disabilities and are not fully abled, and those are highly represented in our community as well.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you.

Mr. HALL. Overall, the Pell Grant is very important for us, our students, and our longevity of education in our community.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you.

Dr. Sims.

Ms. SIMS. We have a very similar story. It concerns me gravely to think that we would not be able to serve students and my students would not have access to Pell Grant. The interesting thing is, for some—we have even looked at how it impacts our community because at one of our local high schools, with over a 90 percent eligibility rate, there were about 200 applications.

Some students still—there are people who still do not know that there—Pell Grants are available, and so the education piece that you mentioned, that is critically important to informing students about the opportunity because, simply, we need them in the workforce. We need them trained.

I am convinced that we have the talent, and so, the challenge is to give that talent access to the appropriate training and put them in the workforce.

We work really hard to supplement Pell Grants. We have set up a foundation during my tenure, and I—we raised money for scholarships, and we call them gap scholarships, to ensure that a student does not have to stop out because they cannot pay whatever is left after the Pell Grant, because, honestly, with the costs, again,

our students, it costs more, so there are additional costs associated with their attending.

So—and we too, as far as AI, we train, we encourage AI-proof programs. For a plumber, HVAC person, you have got to have a body to show up. Our students know that. For our students who are in programs like healthcare programs who can be impacted by AI, it is important that we have the technology and the infrastructure to introduce them to those changes——

Mr. POCAN. Thank you.

Ms. SIMS [continuing]. That are coming, so that they will be prepared.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you, and my time is up, Mr. Morgan, so—but I appreciate you being here as well. Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Ms. Dean. Ms. Dean.

Ms. DEAN. Thank you, Chairman, and I thank you for holding this important hearing. I have to tell you, Chairman, and our witnesses, I am a former professor. I taught for 10 years at a school in Philadelphia. I was a professor of writing, rhetoric, and ethics. I share your passion for educating young people, and sometimes not-so-young people.

I also am a partial product of community colleges. I was able to take community college courses in my Montgomery County area when I was younger, and I benefited greatly from that.

A shout-out to Montgomery County Community College in my area and also Reading Area Community College, two excellent places of getting education.

In the previous Congress, I was proud to introduce America's College Promise alongside Mike Levin. That legislation would have made community college tuition-free for students nationwide, helping to remove these barriers we are talking about in terms of cost.

Dr. Hall, what you just said with such clarity—I am going to see if I can find it—what you just said with such clarity, you said, ″Often the cost of education defeats the purpose of getting one.″ It could not be said much more clearly than that.

I am thinking about the Pell Grants, and you just began to answer, through Representative Pocan's questions, about Pell Grants. They have been capped, if I have it right, at $7,395 since the 2023–2024 cycle, despite inflation, despite rising costs of living, and all that our students are struggling with.

In addition to what you were all talking about—Mr. Morgan, maybe you did not have a chance to speak to this issue of Pell Grants and the meaning of them—how would increasing the maximum Pell Grant work for your students?

What opportunities would that open up in addition to just making sure more and more of our students know about them?

Maybe I will start on this side, Mr. Morgan, since you—we ran out of time before.

Mr. MORGAN. Thank you for the question. As I mentioned earlier, with our vast, you know, footprint that we have of 4,600 square miles, within that large radius, over 70 percent of our citizens are Pell-eligible. That is a massive amount of individuals that are eligible. It kind of tells you the need that we have in northwest rural Alabama.

If we extended or increased the Pell, I mean, that takes care of tuition which is great, but the other barriers—transportation, childcare, other unknown expenses that are inevitable, right, it is going to happen—that could help with some of those things as well as they are progressing through for their credential or their degree, what have you.

I think it is incredibly important that if we can get more, there is additional funding, that is going to just increase—more opportunities and take stress away from that individual.

Because so many folks that are on Pell, that are in our classrooms that are working, they could be full-time, they got more than one job, they have children, there is so many responsibilities. If we can help alleviate any more of that stress and make that pathway a little bit clearer and easier, the better for that student.

Ms. DEAN. I saw that with my own students, and I am out of the classroom now 12, 13 years, but I saw that same juggle, that same——

Mr. MORGAN. Yes.

Ms. DEAN [continuing]. Unaffordability.

Dr. Sims.

Ms. SIMS. I completely agree. I think we can also see increases in student performance based on having some of those barriers addressed, and we know that it increases persistence. Those students can continue their education without having to stop out every other semester to catch up——

Ms. DEAN. Yeah.

Ms. SIMS [continuing]. Which, in turn, increases our retention as well as our graduation rates, and so all of those reduce barriers.

On my campus, 83 percent of my students are Pell-eligible and participate in the program, so it has a significant impact on my student population.

Ms. DEAN. I just wanted to give a chance, Mr. Jyotishi, we have—in my district, Johnson & Johnson is putting up a new manufacturing—high-tech manufacturing facility, providing more than 500 biotech jobs.

I am wondering, in terms of the work that you are doing and that your group is doing, what role does community colleges play in preparing the workforce for that kind of high-tech pharmaceutical manufacturing?

Mr. JYOTISHI. Thank you very much for the question, Representative Dean.

I would say a critical role. Community colleges play a really important component in our bio-economy. We have seen the expansion of biotech programs at the degree level and the non-degree level.

In more than half of U.S. States, community colleges actually are starting to offer applied four-year degrees, baccalaureates—community college baccalaureates—to meet the bio-economy needs.

I had a really fascinating exchange with Genentech in San Diego and their collaborations with MiraCosta College, to create one of the very first CCBs in this country to meet biotech needs.

What Genentech told me—I believe I cited this in my written testimony—is that community colleges are an optimal partner for workforce training for the biotech space, because they are willing

to flex, they are willing to work with industry partners, and they are willing to collaborate in ways that four-year's sometimes struggle to do.

I thought that was just really inspiring, and I would imagine that expanded resources would lead to more stories just like that at the non-degree and degree level.

Ms. DEAN. Agree, and thank you, Dr. Hall, for your great clarity. As an appropriator—I am excited to be an appropriator—I want to see that we do everything we possibly can to fully fund at the Federal level, when we can, fully fund all of the endeavors that you are taking good care of. It is exciting to be in your company. Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Mr. Harder.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you so much to everyone coming here to testify today. I am a former community college professor myself, and I know that community colleges are just such a backbone of social mobility and America's workforce development. Thank you for all that you do.

These institutions do something that no other part of our education system does, which is meet employers where they are, train workers for the jobs that actually exist in those communities, and I think that it is only at the beginning of what we can actually be able to achieve with our college system. There is so much more potential.

Specifically, I think that designing a successful career program is only the first step. Once something works, we have to do a better job of scaling it up. How can we take proven success stories, like some of the ones we have heard today, from local examples to regional and national solutions to our workforce-shortage issues?

To give you one example, in my district, San Joaquin Delta Community College has something called Project Hope, which is a nursing program that deals with our nursing shortage and is run, in close coordination, with local employers.

They take folks that have been on the job, in some cases for decades, maybe even a local janitor who has worked but has qualifications, they put that person through nursing school at Delta College, and then they are able to work at the hospital.

Where just a couple of years earlier they might have been doing the cleaning, now they are taking the vitals and helping the patients directly.

It is an incredible success story. It graduates more than 160 nurses annually. The only thing missing is Federal resources to help scale more programs like that across the country.

We have done a lot of hard work identifying the workforce shortages, designing programs that work, but we still see only pockets of success, and not the sustained effort that I think is necessary.

Dr. Sims, my first question is for you. Strengthening Community College Training Grants are one of the few Federal tools aimed at scaling proven, career, integral educational models.

How can we make sure that more successful programs can access this funding at scale?

Ms. SIMS. Thank you for the question, and we have a similar program with our LPN Launch Program with the Huntsville Hospital System in the State of Alabama, where we provide opportunities

for individuals who have been in careers such as phlebotomists, medication assistants, and they have an opportunity to earn their way into nursing positions.

So—and that program has been incredibly successful because it was based directly on the demand from industry, and we have identified individuals in the community who can benefit.

Opportunities for us to highlight and scale those partnerships through direct funding, through the expansion of the Strengthening Community College Training Grants, will allow us to scale.

We have the proven models. We have proven the success of these programs, and so, to be able to scale them would be incredible because we can provide—someone—we mentioned earlier—the suite of careers associated with healthcare professionals, from the certified nurse assistants (CNAs) and phlebotomists, to the registered nurses, all the way to the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), our colleges can do that work.

As we—as you consider your work and expanding the opportunities with which we can qualify programs that have proven, demonstrated success in the areas, that would allow us to scale these programs, these proven models, for our communities.

Mr. HARDER. I thank you.

Mr. Jyotishi, what is missing from the Federal tool kit in order to scale up more of these models more successfully across the country?

Mr. JYOTISHI. Something I might put a fine point on is, you know, the need for technical assistance. Many colleges develop some of these best practices for workforce training without being able to connect with one another.

We have seen this firsthand in our accelerator for community colleges in the innovation economy with the National Science Foundation. If the Department of Education and Labor could foster more support for colleges in implementing these high-impact practices, that would be something that would go a mile further in addition to the expansion of resources to support the creation of programs.

The other thing I might say in response to Representative DeLauro's question as well with regards to quality outcomes, I think it is always amazing how our colleges not only help folks find a job, but ultimately, economic security, and more impact practices that could lead to that outcome—defined as people earning a local living wage, whether you use the MIT living wage calculator or the Alice calculator or what have you—that is what we need.

Unfortunately, there are some occupations in this country where you work full-time, in early childhood education or in some healthcare sectors, where you do not earn a local living wage, and that is not a challenge our community colleges can solve on their own. That is a labor market challenge.

I wanted to put that out there for the record, that this outcome's component is critical, but it is also sometimes difficult in light the way our labor market is structured.

To go back to the question, I would point to technical assistance as a bit of a gap, and I think interagency collaboration could also unlock some of those. I think there is a lot that could be done with Department of Ed, Labor, working with NSF, Agriculture, Energy, and some of these other agencies that do this well.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you so much and I yield back.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Okay. Well, I want to thank all of our panel. Mr. Morgan, Mr. Jyotishi, Dr. Hall, Dr. Sims, thank you all for what you bring—literally bring to the table, and the work that you do.

I think you have seen by the conversation that we have had today that you have a lot of friends here in Washington and the Congress for community and technical colleges. We look forward to working with you, and with that, we are adjourned—oh—really, please. I am sorry.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and I know we are coming to a conclusion here. The issue of quality education and what that is, the definition of that, is critically important to this committee. I say that because we have to—there is a prioritization of programs, et cetera. We need to know what works, what is your methodology of being able to define that quality education.

Quite frankly, I get tired of hearing people talk about programs about which they think are good, bad, or indifferent, and they do not know jack about whether or not this program is working, what difference it makes in people's lives, et cetera.

That your definition of that, and what we can do about that, really is critical, and I hope you can get back to us, through the chairman, that kind of information, where we are making the determination of where we are going to put our Federal dollars.

Let me just make one quick comment about the workforce Pell Grants. You heard what I said in my opening remarks. I want to support, I am a strong supporter of Pell—you know, I have been for a very long time—and increasing the Pell amount. I do not want it to be flat. I think that we should continue to increase it.

This offers short-term programs. It potentially—this is where we get to quality, my friends—it could lead to the proliferation of low-quality programs, specifically those that are—I will just be frank—by predatory, online, for-profit companies. You know, they draw in people, say, it is a quick six-week, eight-week, 10-week program, and it gives you nothing on the other side of it.

This concept was pushed through the reconciliation bill, and it was, I want to say, a party-line vote. I do not want to get to that, but it was a party-line vote to doing that.

What we need to do is to have input. This is not a partisan issue. This is an issue for us to face nationwide. We need to figure out what it is that is going to require on this, is input from both sides of the aisle.

This Appropriations Committee is responsible for funding Pell Grants and making sure that the programs work as we pass the bills in a bipartisan way, and with that kind of cooperation.

I want—we need—and we need your help with the stronger guardrails for these short-term workforce Pell Grants as we move forward, and that would be a critical ingredient for us, I think, to share the bipartisan support that we need to make this work.

I thank you very, very much for what you do. I am a strong believer in community colleges. I really do think you are—you know, you are the answer to millions of young people, and older people, to be able to succeed economically. Thank you for what you do. Appreciate it. Thanks.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, Ms. DeLauro, and thank you to each again. We look forward to working with you and how we can work with you with community and technical colleges.

With that, we are dismissed.

[Whereupon, at 12:14 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2026.

MEMBERS' DAY

Mr. ADERHOLT. All right. Good morning, everyone. It is my pleasure to welcome everyone to the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education for our Member Day hearing. We look forward to taking testimony from our colleagues this morning here in the subcommittee. This is an opportunity for any member of Congress to come before this panel and draw our attention to issues of importance, both to their districts as well as across the Nation. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues about the challenges they see and how this subcommittee can help address those challenges. Before we begin, I would like to turn to the ranking member for any remarks that you would care to make at this time.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for holding this Member Day on the hearing on the 2027 budget. The programs in the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education appropriations bill directly impact the lives of Americans across our country, especially children, families, and seniors. The Labor-HHS-Education bill funds programs like Head Start, levels the playing field for low-income children looking to get a good education. It provides Pell Grants for students to go to college, pursue their dreams. It funds lifesaving biomedical research as well as public health. It funds programs that help Americans get the skill they need to live successful and fulfilling lives, and the list goes on. It is why it is so important for the Appropriations Committee and the Congress to enact the Labor-HHS-Education bill for fiscal year 2027, and our communities need assurance that these are critical lifelines that will continue to be available to them.

It is the administration's responsibility to implement these important programs at their legally-required funding levels and according to congressional intent. As we hear from our colleagues about their top priorities for fiscal year 2027, which is incredibly important, I would implore our colleagues to remain vigilant about this year. The Constitution is clear: Congress holds the power of the purse. We passed the Labor-HHS-Education bill on a bipartisan, bicameral basis, and now is time that we hold the administration accountable.

Thank you, and I yield back, and I thank you for the hearing, Mr. Chair.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, Ranking Member, and now I would like to recognize our first witness, Representative Luttrell from Texas. You have the floor.

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2026.

WITNESS

HON. MORGAN LUTTRELL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS

Mr. LUTTRELL. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, thank you for having me today. You both mentioned the importance of health. I am specifically going to speak on brain health, which I adamantly believe is something that we do not pay attention to, either in the medical space nationally or globally. As we move through these appropriations, I want to focus on the brain research innovative neurotechnologies through the NIH funding. Back in 2014, this was started.

In 2014, I was exiting the military and actually in grad school studying neuroscience, and I did not specifically get to touch that grant funding, but I saw how it started to change the landscape. From 2014 to 2026, what we know about the brain and brain health has changed every second of every minute and every hour of every day. Currently, the 21st Century Cures Act, which provides funding for this program, is sunsetting, and of everything that we do in this wonderful place, one thing that we absolutely need to remember is how important that gelatinous substance between our ears is. It gives us capabilities. It allows us to do amazing things. It allows us—for you to understand what I am saying, contemplate the contemplation of thought, put a man on the moon, everything. If we had the ability to train and educate and cure the diseases of the brain, because we primarily focus from the neck down, and we have been doing that at an exceptional level since we have been walking around.

Decreasing funding. I am actually asking for an increase in funding in this program, and this is the reason why. This place always asks for a return on the investment. It does, and if any program has provided or given the American people and the public something, it is this specific program, amongst many others, but this one specifically. It has provided brain mapping because today, currently, we still have no idea how this wonderful organism works. We just do not. We have not figured that out yet, but the scientists and researchers that are in this space have created brain mapping, neural pixels. They have given us the ability for deep brain stimulation. That directly affects Parkinson's disease. I have a family member who had Parkinson's, still does currently. Convulsions and shakes were out of control. Deep brain stimulation paused it.

This money directly affects that, and because of the advancements of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and language models that live and breathe in laboratories and institutions of higher education, instead of baby steps, we are taking profound leaps forward. I had a traumatic brain injury when I was in the military, and I spent in the military and my post-military life addressing that issue, and it is the reason I went back to school. Hav-

ing a pause, purposeful pause in these programs would kill a momentum that we will never get back.

My professor said this was the decade of the brain, and that was 10 years ago. These computational analytics are allowing real-time diagnostics. We are able to see things at different levels inside the human brain. I have always been asked, why can we not figure this out? How can this be so challenging if we have been funding and doing these studies for decades? One of the many issues is, sir, your brain is different than mine. Young lady, yours is different than mine. Ma'am, yours is different than mine. You cannot have a control group of a thousand people because every single human brain is different, and you have to see it that way.

That is one of the many challenges that our doctors, and clinicians, and scientists, and neuroscientists, and data scientists are facing, but they have got a lane and they are moving at amazing speed. In Washington, DC, I share this House with you. One thing, if we can get rid of something, we can add something. If we can do anything to help the American people, aside of that, if a mother brings her baby into the emergency room with a head injury, the neurologist can look at her and go, "we have got this, I can give you your child back," because, currently, with brain disease and brain injury or brain distractions, we are dead in the water, and this program specifically is breaking through those barricades.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, thank you.

[The information follows:]

Written Testimony
The Honorable Morgan Luttrell
Member of Congress, Texas 8th District

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Thursday, March 5, 2025

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLaruo, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank for the opportunity to testify before you on key priorities for Fiscal Year 2027. As you begin your work on this next year's appropriations bill, I strongly urge you to consider increased funding for federal brain health initiatives.

Originally established in 2014, the NIH Brain Research Through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative, is responsible for facilitating groundbreaking discoveries and transforming scientific research. It brings together Federal and non-Federal partners with a singular common goal – accelerating the development of innovative neurotechnologies.

Congress has invested over a decade's worth of resources into the program. That investment has drastically improved the lives of individuals with debilitating brain and central nervous system conditions while also seeing breakthroughs in research methodologies and tools.

As co-chair of the Congressional Neuroscience Caucus and the Congressional Brain Injury Taskforce, I'm proud of the work my colleagues on this subcommittee continue to do. The progress we're seeing today didn't happen by accident. It is the result of serious commitment and a shared belief that America leads from the front.

The work being done through the BRAIN Initiative isn't just promising — it's mission-critical. Millions of Americans are fighting battles against brain diseases, conditions, traumatic injuries, and neurological conditions. They deserve answers. They deserve hope. And they deserve action.

That means backing the scientists on the front lines. These men and women are digging into the complexities of the human brain so we can better understand what healthy function looks like, what goes wrong, and how we fix it. Sustained investment isn't a luxury — it's a responsibility. Every dollar we commit moves us closer to real treatments, real cures, and real prevention strategies for some of the toughest diseases facing our nation. We don't quit on hard problems. We lean in. And when it comes to protecting the health and future of the American people, we lead.

BRAIN Initiative projects cut across disciplines and bring together some of the brightest minds in the country. Every one of these efforts reflect the core tenets of the Initiative: innovation, collaboration, transparency, and strong ethical neuroscience. That is not just talk. It is the standard.

We're prioritizing the development of cutting-edge tools, technologies, and shared resources that supercharge discovery. When you build the right platforms, you don't just make incremental progress, you change the game for the entire field. We are seeing the results. Breakthroughs that once seemed out of reach are now becoming reality. What used to be

theoretical is now tangible. That's what happens when you set high expectations, invest strategically, and empower great scientists to do what they do best.

For the first time ever, the BRAIN Initiative Cell Census Network (BICCN) program created a complete cell atlas of a mouse brain and started drafting a cell atlas of the human brain. We are closer than ever before to fundamentally understand how the human brain works on a cellular level. The Armamentarium for Precision Brain Cell Access, a large-scale project funded by the BRAIN Initiative, enables a new, emerging therapeutic toolkits to identify specific brain and spinal cord cells with unprecedented precision. All the work coming out of the BRAIN Initiative is laying the groundwork for highly targeted therapies that could one day treat a wide range of neurological and neuropsychiatric disorders at the cellular level – an advancement the was once never thought possible.

Our scientists have made tremendous progress, but we have a long path ahead of us if we are ever going to fully understand how the human brain works. Continued BRAIN Initiative research will spur groundbreaking products to market and will position our clinicians to provide truly lifechanging treatments to their patients in the most desperate need.

Congress has primarily funded the program through two funding streams. The first, and primary allocation, is through the 10 BRAIN Initiatives Institutes and Centers. Their missions and research portfolios make up the BRAIN Initiative within NIH. The second source comes from an additional funding authorization, the 21st Century Cures Act. The Cures Act

supplemental was signed into law in 2016 to boost key innovative programs, including the BRAIN Initiative.

Congress has provided much needed funding to the BRAIN Initiative through both funding streams, but now the program faces a crossroads despite the tremendous progress that has been made. This fiscal year marks the expiration of the CURES Act funding. Those funds are the reason for exponential growth in neuroscientific research and understanding. There is still so much more to discover.

In FY26, the BRAIN Initiative received $234 million in base funding and an additional $195 million from the CURES Innovation Fund, totaling $429 million dedicated to federal brain health research. That $429 million is still less than base funding in FY22. Now with the sunset of the CURES Act, the BRAIN Initiative possibly faces a drastic 45% cut in FY27 funding.

Without an increased investment in discretionary funding, all the progress the BRAIN Initiative has made faces a potential end. Progress towards curing for some of the most common and challenging brain conditions will come to a stop. Halting this work is dangerous for our scientists, our military, our veterans, our constituents, and the United States as a whole.

I respectfully ask that you please ensure sustained funding for the BRAIN Initiative's groundbreaking work by providing $468 million in Fiscal Year 2027.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you so much.

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Yes.

Ms. DELAURO. Just before our colleague leaves, I thank you very much for your passion around the issue. I think it is so true. We somehow divorce the head from the rest of the body. We do that with vision, with teeth, et cetera, here. Long and the short of it, you make a good point. The research from the Brain Initiative, as I understand it, is producing a heck of a lot of further action in terms of grants, et cetera. You are right that it sunsets, 2026 it sunsets, and what we did was we enacted $195 million for 2026. Whatever money will be forthcoming will come from this committee, and I think you make an important, strong argument here for us to look at.

I will just say to you, no one can tell you where that number will be. Obviously, $195, if you had flat funded, it would be a victory, but I understand where you are coming from and where I am coming from, and you know committees. How can we increase it and not lose the great work and the money that we put into the Brave Initiative over a 10-year period? Thank you so much——

Mr. LUTTRELL. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. DELAURO [continuing]. For, you know——

Mr. LUTTRELL. To your point, you cannot take your head off and put it on the bedside table at night.

Ms. DELAURO. No. Hell, no.

Mr. LUTTRELL. You have to fix them both.

Ms. DELAURO. Why do we divorce that? I think that it is a big item on mental health as well, and it is also traumatic brain injury. Thank you for your service, but thank God for your amazing recovery from a traumatic brain industry. I am glad to serve with you. Thanks.

Mr. LUTTRELL. It has been an honor.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for being here today.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Have a blessed day.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you. Next, I would like to recognize Representative Laura Gillen from New York.

[Pause.]

Mr. ADERHOLT. Welcome to the subcommittee. We look forward to hearing your testimony.

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2026.

WITNESS

HON. LAURA GILLEN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Ms. GILLEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am here as a colleague, as a mother, and as a proud member of the Bipartisan Black Maternal Health Caucus to ask you to continue to make critical lifesaving investments to help reduce inequities in maternal health.

Mr. Chairman, having a baby and starting a family is a fundamental part of the American Dream for so many people in our country. We should do everything that we can to ensure that mothers of all backgrounds are able to safely deliver happy and healthy children. Speaking with women and families across my district on the South Shore of Long Island in Nassau County, I have heard about the real impact of enormous disparities in maternal health outcomes that women of color face.

The facts are clear: black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than any other group of women. They are also twice as likely to lose an infant to a pregnancy premature-related death. I promised my community that when I came to Congress, I would join the Black Maternal Health Caucus and work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to fix these devastating inequities. We can do much more to support mothers at every stage, from fertility to pregnancy, delivery, and postpartum care.

In fiscal year 2026, Congress provided a $10 million increase in the funding for the NIH Implementing a Maternal health and PRegnancy Outcomes Vision for Everyone (IMPROVE) Initiative for research into maternal mortality. Today, I am urging you to provide another $10 million increase, bringing total funding for the IMPROVE Initiative to $73.4 million, and target funding for populations that are disproportionately impacted. I also urge the subcommittee to increase funding for the special programs of regional and national significance, the Special Projects of Regional and National Significance (SPRANS) portion of child and maternal health block grants, particularly the Maternal Health Research Collaborative for Minority Serving Institutions, or MSIs. This program strengthens research capacity. It trains providers and helps develop evidence-based solutions to address maternal health disparities. Investing in programs like the IMPROVE Initiative, SPRANS, and MSIs will make a real difference for mothers across our country. These programs support data-driven research and projects, they strengthen our healthcare delivery system, and they help save lives.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, let us help give more mothers a better chance at a safe and healthy pregnancy and safe and healthy babies. I look forward to working with you and all of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to reduce disparities, improve black maternal health, and help mothers, children, and families all across our country. Thank you, and I yield back.

[The information follows:]

Testimony of The Honorable Laura A. Gillen (NY-04)
"Member Day Hearing"
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
March 5, 2025

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am here today as a colleague, as a mother, and as a proud member of the bipartisan Black Maternal Health Caucus -- to ask you to continue to make critical, lifesaving investments to help reduce inequities in maternal health.

Mr. Chairman, having a baby and starting a family is a fundamental part of the American dream for so many in our country. We should do everything we can to ensure that mothers of all backgrounds are able to safely deliver happy and healthy children.

Speaking with women and families across my district on the South Shore of Nassau County on Long Island, I've heard about the real impact of enormous disparities in maternal health outcomes that women of color face.

The facts are clear: black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than other women. They are also twice as likely to lose an infant to premature death.

I promised my community that when I got to Congress, I would join the Black Maternal Health Caucus and work with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to help fix these devastating inequities. We can do much more to support mothers at every stage -- from fertility care to pregnancy, delivery, and postpartum.

In Fiscal Year 2026, Congress provided a $10 million increase in funding for the NIH IMPROVE initiative for research on maternal mortality. Today, I am urging you to provide another $10 million increase, bringing total funding for the IMPROVE initiative to $73.4 million, and target funding for populations that are disproportionately affected.

I also urge the Subcommittee to increase funding for the Special Programs of Regional and National Significance (SPRANS) portion of Child and Maternal Health Block Grants, particularly the Maternal Health Research Collaborative for Minority-Serving Institutions, or MSIs. This program strengthens research capacity, trains providers, and helps develops evidence-based solutions to address maternal health disparities.

Investing in programs like the IMPROVE initiative, SPRANS, and MSIs will make a real difference for mothers across the country. These programs support data-driven research and projects, strengthen our healthcare delivery system, and help save lives.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, let's help give more mothers a better chance at a safe and healthy pregnancy.

I look forward to working with you and our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to reduced disparities, improve black maternal health, and help mothers, children and families.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, Representative Gillen. I appreciate your words there and bringing this to our attention. Thanks so much.

Ms. DELAURO. I want to say a thank you to you for highlighting maternal health. For so many years, it has been on a back burner, and given the statistics, and, particularly, with black maternal health. We know that is just a result of the lack of resources and investments and making sure, as you pointed out, that there is the work that is done all along the spectrum of needs for women in terms of childbirth.

I think that, oftentimes, people just do not understand the risks involved in childbirth. Excuse me for this. They think it is just a slam dunk. There it is. You are going to have a baby, and it is going to all be okay. That is not the case. Our efforts in terms of increasing the opportunity for us to understand what is happening, how we can turn the tide with some of these disparities. Thanks so much for being a champion of women's health. Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. All right. Next, Debbie, come on up. Oh, Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz from Florida, one of our colleagues here on Appropriations. Look forward to hearing from you.

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2026.

WITNESS

HON. DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF FLORIDA

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro. I am here because I am not on the subcommittee. Even though I ultimately have an opportunity to help shape what is in this bill, I do, as you begin the outset of appropriations season, want to just highlight a couple of priorities.

The Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (LHHS) appropriations bill is more, as you know, than just budgetary line items. You protect the health of our communities, we give our children a fair shot, and we ensure our seniors can age with dignity. As we begin the fiscal year 2027 appropriations cycle, we really have a clear choice: we can weaken these lifesaving investments or we can strengthen them. I am here today to strongly urge that we strengthen them, and I want to speak about two deeply personal priorities, which I know you both have heard me talk about many, many times, fighting cancer and drowning prevention.

Over 18 years ago, I know you know, I heard the three words that no one ever wants to hear: ″You have cancer.″ Rosa, you also have heard those words, and forgive the familiarity, but we are friends here and family, and the crushing weight of that, and the way I have always described it is that it hit me like an anvil. I battled cancer with everything I had. I survived. I am here today to fight for others, but survivorship gave me more than gratitude. It gave me purpose and passion, and I decided to use my voice for the women who feel alone in that doctor's office, for the young women who never imagined cancer could happen to them, for the families

who fear the worst. No woman, no one should fight a battle like that alone.

That mission, as you know, led me to author and champion the Breast Cancer Education and Awareness Requires Learning Young (EARLY) Act, a law that includes a national education and awareness campaign that targets younger women and women at higher risk about the importance of paying attention to their breast health. It also funds a grant program to assist with the unique challenges facing young women with breast cancer. I am thankful that the EARLY Act received nearly $7 million in fiscal year 2026. With breast cancer cases, though, on the rise in younger women, and that is a recent development that is really disturbing, approving the full funding of $9 million is critical to help other women catch breast cancer early.

Early detection is the key to survival. It is why I am here, and with full funding, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) can expand outreach, strengthen provider education and grant funding, and they can reach more young survivors and previvors, and they can even help make sure that young women know that they have to pay attention to their breast health, that they know what is normal for them so they know when something feels different. These are dollars that do not sit idle. They empower women with knowledge, connect them with care, and save lives.

Since the EARLY Act was signed into law, over 600,000 young breast cancer survivors now have access to critical educational resources. Millions more have access to grant funding that helps. There are organizations that the grant funding assists in helping young women and women at higher risk deal with the unique challenges that we face when we get a breast cancer diagnosis.

We cannot take our foot off the gas. Cancer does not wait, but when we detect it early, when we expand access to screenings, when we educate and empower women, we reduce mortality, and we increase survivorship, and we can turn fear into hope and anxiety into action. If there is any issue without a party affiliation, it is fighting cancer, and I have felt that all of these years, and I know Rosa has as well. As appropriators, though, I am thankful that we ultimately gave the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI), NIH got $128 million more—excuse me—NCI got $128 million more. NIH got a $415 million increase, but the President proposed hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts that would have been devastating. It would have left patients waiting for treatments that might never come.

We have to implement guardrails to ensure cancer research funding is not being illegally withheld by this or future administrations. That is the prerogative of the Appropriations Committee. We have to stand up for Article I as appropriators. It is a banner right underneath the dais in front of the chairman because researchers need stability, our scientists need certainty, and cancer patients deserve to see progress. Lives depend on it.

I want to briefly touch on another crisis, one that unfolds quietly, often without headlines, but one that devastates families just the same, and that is drowning. Last year in Florida, a record high 119 lives were lost to drowning. Since 2009, nearly three-quarters of Florida's drowning deaths have been children under three years

old, and nationally, drowning remains the leading cause of death for children through accidental death from ages one to four. These are not accidents that we can have to simply accept. This is an urgent public health crisis and one we must call out.

The heartbreaking truth is that drowning is preventable. When we invest in drowning prevention at the CDC, we equip communities with the tools to save children's lives, which is why I am requesting $5 million in fiscal year 2027 for drowning prevention activities conducted at the CDC's National Center for Injury Control and Prevention. We have funded them the last several years, and I want to urge the continued funding. With these resources, CDC can strengthen drowning surveillance, identify at-risk communities, and expand access to proven, preventive strategies like swim lessons and water safety education.

We also know that drowning does not strike evenly. Individuals with autism spectrum disorder face a risk 40 times higher than the general population. Children in low-income and rural communities also face greater barriers to swim lessons or water safety resources, but we can change that. No parent should experience a preventable tragedy in their backyard or at the public pool. No community should accept the preventable loss of a child.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I know I will have many more opportunities to talk with you about this when we are sitting down the hallway together for hours on end in markups, but I stand ready to work, as we always have with both of you, with our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to protect cancer research, early detection information and resources, and to end this preventable drowning crisis. Thank you so much.

[The information follows:]

LHHS Member Day Testimony — Rep. Wasserman Schultz
Thursday, March 5, 2026 at 10:30 AM | 5 minutes

<<INTRODUCTION>>
Thank you, Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro, for holding this member day hearing.

The Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies bill is more than just budgetary line items — it saves lives. It protects the health of our communities, it gives our children a fair shot, and it ensures our seniors can age with dignity.

As we approach the FY27 appropriations cycle, we face a choice. We can weaken these lifesaving investments, or we can strengthen them. I urge us to strengthen them.

Today, I want to speak about two deeply personal priorities: cancer and drowning.

<<YOUR CANCER JOURNEY>>
Over 17 years ago, I heard the three words that change everything: “You have cancer.”

In that moment, fear took hold. The uncertainty. The questions. The fight ahead.

I battled cancer with everything I had. And I survived.

But survivorship gave me more than gratitude, it gave me purpose and passion. I decided to use my voice for the women who feel alone in that doctor’s office. For the

young women who never imagined cancer could happen to them. For the families who fear the worst.

No woman should fight this battle alone.

<<EARLY Act>>
That mission led me to champion the EARLY Act — landmark legislation that funds breast cancer awareness and education for young women about early screening and detection.

I'm grateful you funded this program at $6,960,000 in FY26. For FY27, I respectfully request full funding at $9 million.

With full funding, the CDC can expand outreach, strengthen provider education, and support the psychosocial needs of young survivors and previvors through community-based strategies. These dollars do not sit idle. They empower women with knowledge, connect them with care, and save lives. And the results show just that. Since the EARLY Act was signed into law, over 600,000 young breast cancer survivors now have access to breast cancer educational resources and tools.

We cannot take our foot off the gas.

Cancer does not wait. But when we detect it early, when we expand access to screenings, when we educate and empower women, we reduce mortality and increase survivorship. We turn fear into hope, and anxiety into action.

<<CUTS TO CANCER>>
Yet despite our progress, some in this administration have treated cancer research as optional.

Last year, President Trump's illegal withholding of funds from the National Institutes of Health forced 383 clinical trials to shut down, including trials testing new cancer treatments.

That decision didn't just cut funding. It cut off hope. It halted breakthroughs. It left patients waiting for treatments that may never come.

We cannot allow politics to contaminate science.

As appropriators, we must fully fund the National Cancer Institute and block harmful indirect cost caps at NIH. We must also implement guardrails to ensure cancer research funding is not being illegally withheld by this administration. Because Researchers need stability. Our scientists need certainty. And cancer patients deserve to see progress.

Lives depend on it.

<<DROWNING>>
Now I want to turn to another crisis. One that unfolds quietly, often without headlines, but devastates families just the same: drowning.

Last year in Florida, a record high 119 lives were lost to drowning. Since 2009, nearly three-quarters of Florida's drowning deaths have been children under three years old. And nationally, drowning remains the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 4.

These are not accidents we must simply accept. This is a urgent public health crisis, and one we must call out.

The heartbreaking truth is that drowning is preventable.

When we invest in drowning prevention at the CDC, we equip communities with the tools to save children's lives. I thank you for funding drowning prevention at $2 million in FY26. For FY27, I request $5 million for drowning prevention activities at the CDC's National Center for Injury Control and Prevention.

With these resources, CDC can strengthen drowning surveillance, identify at-risk communities, and expand access to proven prevention strategies like swim lessons and water safety education.

We also know drowning does not strike evenly. Individuals with autism spectrum disorder face a risk 40 times higher than the general population. Children in low-income and rural communities face greater barriers to swim instruction and water safety resources.

We can change that.

No parent should experience the silence of a backyard pool gone wrong. No community should accept the preventable loss of a child.

<<CLOSING>>
Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

I stand ready to work with both of you, and with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, to protect cancer research, strengthen lifesaving programs, and end the drowning crisis.

We have the power to save lives. Let's use it.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you for calling both of those issues to our attention, of course, obviously very important and cancer, you know, impacts, I think, about every person's life, either directly or indirectly. Thank you for bringing that, but as well as the drowning issue as well. We look forward to working with you. Thanks.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. DELAURO. I really want to say just such a thank you to you. Let me start with the drowning issue. That is preventable. Oftentimes people say, well, you know, that is a fringe. That is a fringe issue.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Right.

Ms. DELAURO. I volunteered in a community school many years ago in New Haven, which had a pool in which low-income kids, kids with discipline were there, they had swim lessons, et cetera. All of a sudden, there was a determination that this was frivolous. Why are we funding a community pool, and it was gone, and actually they used it for storage for books. There are books piled up, and the point is that kids are drowning. You said the statistics, and we have the ability. This is not——

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Right.

Ms. DELAURO. You know? Not everybody has a father like mine or a family like you that took you to the beach, taught you how to swim, et cetera, et cetera. That is not the case. Thank you for highlighting the issue. Look, your words about your survival and purpose and passion, that, I think, are the bywords on this and what we need to do to deal with cancer research and the NCI. Thank you so, so much. Oftentimes people think that we create issues here or we champion issues that, you know, come out of nowhere. Not the case. It comes out of experience, what your experience is and how you can translate that experience in helping to make a difference. Thank you on both those scores. I appreciate you.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, my Sister Survivor.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you both, and my friend, the chairman. Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Next, we would like to recognize Mr. Chuck Edwards, a congressman from North Carolina, and we look forward to hearing your testimony here about some issues that you will call to our attention.

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2026.

WITNESS

HON. CHUCK EDWARDS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

Mr. EDWARDS. Thanks very much, Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the Labor-HHS Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify here before you today.

I represent North Carolina's 11th District in Western North Carolina. Over the last five years, the largest hospital in my district, Mission Hospital in Asheville, owned and operated by HCA Healthcare, has received four immediate jeopardy citations from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). That is

four immediate jeopardy citations. To put this in perspective of how atrocious this designation is, nationwide, fewer than one percent of hospitals receive even one such citation any given year, reflecting HCA's repeated failures.

An immediate jeopardy designation is the most serious enforcement finding CMS may issue. It means that a provider's noncompliance has placed patients at risk of serious injury, serious harm, serious impairment, or death. The people of Western North Carolina are demanding corrective action. The question is whether CMS has adequate tools to enforce accountability in our hospitals.

Under current law, CMS has limited options, short of terminating Medicare and Medicaid participation. Termination must remain an option in extreme cases, but due to hospital consolidations in recent years, terminating Medicare and Medicaid participation is just not an option because it would leave countless patients with no option for healthcare, and it threatens their access to essential services and can destabilize the only hospital network serving thousands of families. We should not have to choose between accountability and access.

I am introducing the Healthcare Accountability Act, or HCA Mission Act. This legislation would give CMS immediate and effective enforcement tools when immediate jeopardy is identified. Currently, when a nursing home is cited for immediate jeopardy, CMS may impose civil monetary penalties, require direct training, and mandate plans of correction. They may appoint temporary management or implement State monitoring. This framework allows CMS to compel compliance and protect patients without immediately terminating Federal program participation. Hospitals, however, operate within a far more limited enforcement structure. My proposal would extend similar authorities to hospitals, whether for-profit or nonprofit. The goal is correction, patient protection, and sustained access. By equipping CMS with immediate remedies, Congress can address serious deficiencies while maintaining continuity of care in rural communities.

As my office reviewed hospital immediate jeopardy findings nationwide, we found that it was not consistently tracked in a centralized, publicly-accessible manner. If immediate jeopardy represents the highest level of patient safety concern, it also warrants full transparency. Without consolidated data, congressional oversight becomes reactive rather than proactive. Policymakers, patients, and communities should be able to find how often citations occur, how quickly they are resolved, and what corrective actions are taken. For that reason, I believe the fiscal year 2027 Labor-HHS appropriations bill should include report language directing CMS to systematically collect and publish data related to hospital immediate jeopardy findings.

Finally, we must ensure adequate resources. With a requested $28 million budget increase in the State survey and certification line items, CMS needs the capacity to conduct timely inspections, which is the foundation of effective hospital oversight. Regular inspections are the foundation of the enforcement system. These surveys identify deficiencies, determine whether immediate jeopardy conditions exist and initiate corrective action. If survey backlogs grow or staffing levels fall short, oversight weakens.

My goals are clear: improve hospital enforcement practices without compromising rural access to healthcare; strengthen oversight by requiring systematic data collection and public reporting on hospital immediate jeopardy findings; and ensure CMS and State survey agencies have the resources necessary to carry out patient safety. Rural communities across the country deserve safe and reliable hospitals that protect its patients. I look forward to working with the subcommittee on these reforms, and I thank you, and I yield back.

[The information follows:]

Congressman Chuck Edwards Remarks - LHHS Member Day: HCA Mission Hospital Oversight

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Members of the Labor-HHS Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I represent North Carolina's 11th District in Western North Carolina. Over the past five years, the largest hospital in my district, Mission Hospital in Asheville, owned and operated by HCA Healthcare, has received four Immediate Jeopardy citations from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. To put this in perspective of how atrocious this designation is, nationwide, fewer than one percent of hospitals receive one such citation any given year — reflecting HCA's repeated failures.

An Immediate Jeopardy designation is the most serious enforcement finding CMS may issue. It means that a provider's noncompliance has placed patients at risk of serious injury, serious harm, serious impairment, or death.

The people of WNC are demanding corrective action. The question is whether CMS has adequate tools to enforce accountability in our hospitals.

Under current law, CMS has limited options short of terminating Medicare and Medicaid participation. Termination must remain an option in extreme cases. But due to hospital consolidations in recent years, terminating Medicare and Medicaid participation is just not an option because it would leave countless patients with no option for healthcare, and threatens their access to essential services. and can destabilize the only hospital network serving thousands of families.

We should not have to choose between accountability and access. I am introducing the *Healthcare Accountability, or HCA, Mission Act*. This legislation would give CMS immediate and effective enforcement tools when Immediate Jeopardy is identified.

Currently, when a nursing home is cited for Immediate Jeopardy, CMS may impose civil monetary penalties, require directed training, mandate plans of correction, appoint temporary management, or implement state monitoring. This framework allows CMS to compel compliance and protect patients without immediately terminating federal program participation.

Hospitals, however, operate within a far more limited enforcement structure. My proposal would extend similar authorities to hospitals—whether for-profit or nonprofit—when Immediate Jeopardy conditions are found.

The goal is correction, patient protection, and sustained access. By equipping CMS with intermediate remedies, Congress can address serious deficiencies while maintaining continuity of care in rural communities.

As my office reviewed hospital Immediate Jeopardy findings nationwide, we found that it wasn't consistently tracked in a centralized, publicly accessible manner. If Immediate Jeopardy represents the highest level of patient safety concern, it warrants full transparency.

Without consolidated data, congressional oversight becomes reactive rather than proactive. Policymakers, patients, and communities should be able to find how often citations occur, how quickly they are resolved, and what corrective actions are taken.

For that reason, I believe the Fiscal Year 2027 Labor-HHS appropriations bill should include report language directing CMS to systematically collect and publish data related to hospital Immediate Jeopardy findings.

Finally, we must ensure adequate resources.

With a requested $28 million budget increase in the State Survey and Certification line item, CMS needs the capacity to conduct timely inspections — the foundation of effective hospital oversight.

Regular inspections are the foundation of the enforcement system. These surveys identify deficiencies, determine whether Immediate Jeopardy conditions exist, and initiate corrective action. If survey backlogs grow or staffing levels fall short, oversight weakens.

My goals are clear:

- Improve hospital enforcement practices without compromising rural access to care.
- Strengthen oversight by requiring systematic data collection and public reporting on hospital Immediate Jeopardy findings.
- And ensure CMS and state survey agencies have the resources necessary to carry out patient safety.

Rural communities across the country deserve safe and reliable hospitals that protects its patients.

I look forward to working with the Subcommittee on these reforms.

Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, Mr. Edwards, for your testimony, and, again, calling this to our attention, and that is certainly what this is for. As you know, there are so many issues that the Labor Health and Human Services and Education Subcommittee covers that having a little bit of knowledge about some of these issues that may need a little more attention is very important. Thank you. Ranking Member, would you like——

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you very, very much for your testimony. I want you to know that the State surveys are funded with this bill and would support the increase for that. I think that is really critical. I also think this goes beyond. I think what you are talking about is rural areas, but this goes beyond rural areas, and I think we should be very, very concerned about that and would love to work with you on report language and seeing what we can do. I am hoping that you are in touch with the authorizers as well on this issue, so I really thank you.

Four citations, that is really pretty severe, it is, and you are between a rock and a hard place. What is the penalty, and then what would be the level of service that is going to be applied in areas that have limited, you know, opportunity for access to healthcare? It should not be that way, so let us see how we can, you know, turn this around in some way. Thanks so much. Appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you for your testimony here today, and that concludes all of our witnesses. However, Representative Chris Smith has submitted a request for the record, and that will be included.

[The information follows:]

LHHS Member Day Testimony – Rep. Chris Smith (NJ-04)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this Member Day and giving me the opportunity to testify on critical requests before the Labor-HHS Subcommittee for Fiscal Year 2027. I look forward to continuing to work with you to advance key public health priorities.

I first want to encourage you to provide $23 million for the National Cord Blood Inventory and $35 million for the C.W. Bill Young Cell Transplantation Program. I originally developed the idea for a national cord blood program 25 years ago and authored the original law (The Stem Cell Therapeutic and Research Act of 2005), which created the NCBI and expanded the Transplantation Program.

Since the initial passage of my law, stem cells derived from cord blood and bone marrow have been used successfully to treat tens of thousands of patients. The NCBI, in particular, has been uniquely helpful in providing transplants for pediatric patients. The initial goals of the NCBI were to bank 150,000 high-quality cord blood units. To date, NCBI has banked over 122,500 units.

I ask that you continue to show strong support for these essential programs and provide hope for thousands of patients in need of a donor for a life-saving transplant.

I also ask that you provide $2.5 million for the implementation of the "Grants to Assist in the Recognition of Trafficking," as found in my law, the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. This vital funding protects American children, supports child victims of trafficking and sexual abuse, and strengthens coordination with law enforcement. Since FY 2022, thanks to these grants, over 120,000 people have been trained in 2,500 schools and over 400

children have been identified as potential victims of human trafficking. I urge the subcommittee to support this critical grant funding and strengthen our federal response to human trafficking.

I appreciate the Committee's ongoing support for Lyme disease research and respectfully request that you continue to provide funding for a whole-of-government approach to tackle this pernicious and growing public health threat.

I first ask that the Kay Hagan Tick Act be fully funded to its authorization level of $30 million. The Kay Hagan Tick Act funds vital research into treatment and prevention of tick bites and enables states to greater cooperate with the federal government to monitor the spread of Lyme. It provides $20 million for states at high risk of Lyme to work with the federal government to prevent and mitigate outbreaks, as well as $10 million for Regional Centers of Excellence, which train public health professionals to better track and treat tick bites and control the pathogens they spread.

I also again ask for $5 million for the LymeX Innovation Accelerator. As you know, the LymeX Diagnostics Prize launched Phase 4 of its competition in March of last year. Phase 4 includes 7 teams working to submit new diagnostics for FDA approval, incentivized through prizes, which are generously made possible for by the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation through a groundbreaking public-private partnership.

Last December, I joined Secretary Kennedy and Administrator Oz at a roundtable for Lyme patients, patient advocates and subject matter experts. At the roundtable, Secretary Kennedy announced the renewal of LymeX, cementing the federal government's long-term commitment to this program. Congress should follow HHS's lead and continue to back a program that has demonstrated longevity and the ability to produce innovative diagnostics.

As the federal government continues to shift its focus toward the 1 in 31 autistic children and 1 in 45 autistic adults across the country, I ask that you prioritize federal support for autism research. The Autism CARES Act of 2024, which I authored with substantive input from advocates in the community, reauthorized and enhanced critical federally funded activities that will drive further research breakthroughs in our understanding of autism, health interventions, and services to improve the health and wellbeing of children and adults with autism.

I respectfully ask that the Subcommittee to ensure that the NIH is following through on new requirements from the Autism CARES Act, including the requirement that the Director ensure that research reflects the entire population of individuals with autism spectrum disorders. I also ask that you provide $61.344 million for HRSA's Autism and Developmental Disabilities program, which will support training programs, research, and systems with a focus on improving access, quality, and systems of care for children, adolescents, and young adults with autism or other developmental disabilities.

In addition, I ask that you provide the LEND program with at least $40 million. The 60 LEND programs (located in 44 U.S. states with six additional states and three territories reached through program partnerships without additional federal or state aid) are an effective workforce program that operate within a university medical system and provide graduate-level, interdisciplinary training to the next generation of clinical, research, and community leaders. It is vitally important that we continue to support these programs, which help make a huge difference in the lives of the millions of Americans with autism.

I ask for your continued commitment to sustaining federal investments in biomedical research and public health initiatives focused on the treatment and cure of Fragile X and its related conditions. As you know, mutations of the Fragile X (FMR1) gene result in behavioral,

developmental, cognitive, reproductive, and potentially life-ending neurodegenerative conditions across generations and impact affected individuals from birth to death.

The Committee's previous support for the important work underway at the NIH and CDC is advancing research towards more effective treatments and a cure for Fragile X. For instance, the CDC funds the FORWARD project, a longitudinal database that now includes 12.5 years of historical data on individuals with Fragile X. Continued support for and expansion of this effort, particularly with regard to individuals over 23 who are beginning to age out of the study, is invaluable for potential insights and eventually treatment and a cure for Fragile X.

I appreciate this committee's ongoing support of the Spina Bifida community and again request that the National Spina Bifida Program be funded at $11 million. In the United States, there are an estimated 166,000 individuals living with this condition. Spina Bifida is a birth defect for which there is no cure and results in a spinal cord injury before a baby is born. The National Spina Bifida Program is the only place in the federal government exclusively dedicated to studying this chronic, complex disease affecting children and adults. I ask that you continue to support this vital program at the CDC.

Finally, I ask that you fund include $31.5 million for the Alzheimer's Disease Programs Initiative (ADPI), now administered by CMS, as well as total funding level of approximately $4.2 billion for Alzheimer's research at the NIH. More than 6 million Americans currently have Alzheimer's disease. In 2023, friends and families of those with Alzheimer's and other dementias provided an estimated 18.4 billion hours of unpaid care annually, a contribution to the nation valued at nearly $346 billion. I ask that Congress provide much needed support to caregivers and work to better understand this devastating disease.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of my requests and ask that you continue to prioritize these vital programs.

To: Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee
Date: Tuesday, March 3, 2026
From: The Honorable Sylvia R. Garcia (D-TX-29)
Re: Member Testimony for L-HHS-Ed Appropriations Subcommittee Member Day

Thank you, Mr. Chair, Ranking Member, and Committee Members, for the opportunity to provide written testimony for the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Appropriations Member Day.

This is an important opportunity for Members of the House of Representatives to advocate for our constituents, highlight funding priorities, and help shape the appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2027.

As such, I would like to highlight a few of the top programmatic and language requests that I submitted to the Subcommittee that would have a significant impact on the lives of my constituents in Texas's 29th Congressional District.

These requests would help expand necessary programs for local communities and provide them with access to previously unavailable resources. Although I could continue about the many programs that my district relies on, below are a few of the standout federal programs that my constituents benefit from and value.

I worked with my colleagues in the House of Representatives in advocating for federal investments to improve health workforce programs, specifically the Title VII workforce program,

which would fill gaps in the supply of health professionals and respond to the needs of underserved populations.

I also request robust support for community health centers that provide critical and high-quality health care to low-income families and communities of color. Relatedly, I also urge the Subcommittee to lower costs for hard-working families by supplementing and funding programs that invest in healthcare professionals, specifically those placed in rural and underserved communities.

By bolstering funding for the Hospital Preparedness Program, we can help local communities adequately respond to future extreme heat events. This funding would ensure adequate staffing and coordination capabilities to address health care and public health surges during extreme heat events, such as extreme heat and wildfire smoke.

Related to heat, I also request that any recipients for federally-funded Public Health Preparedness Programs work with state, local, and tribal health agencies to make sure that they prioritize the integration of response, preparedness, and mitigation measures to extreme heat and wildfire smoke into the activities funded through this program.

The HeatRisk Initiative serves as an important impact-based forecast planning tool to enable early interventions that reduce illness and death during periods of dangerous heat. Its integration has become a critical component of emergency response planning and efforts to make America

more resilient in the face of extreme heat events. That is why I request robust funding for, as well as the proper maintenance and expansion of, the HeatRisk impact-based forecast tool.

I also support robust funding for the Hispanic Ph.D. Pilot program that will amplify academic opportunities for Hispanic Ph.D. students, such as graduate research experience and mentorship programs. This program will help bridge the gap for historically underrepresented student populations.

Similarly, I also support the robust funding of programs that would provide legal services for unaccompanied children. Housed through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), these legal services include legal orientation presentations, legal screenings, and full legal representation for children, current or previously released for ORR care. This funding will increase efficiency, basic fairness, and significantly reduce the failure-to-appear rate, while also reducing the backlog.

I also voice my support for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) by funding programs that would strengthen worker protections, including protections from workplace harassment, and strengthen employees' rights to organize and collectively bargain.

In addition, my requests would enhance critical services for unhoused individuals, especially runaway and homeless youth, through robust funding of children and family services programs. I support increasing resources for childcare and family planning services, especially robust funding for sexual health services and Title X programs. This community also includes unhoused

veterans who have been underserved by our government. As such, robust funding for the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program is a necessity. This program focuses on reintegrating veterans into the labor force and addressing systemic issues facing homeless veterans.

Helping veterans and our service members includes helping their families and children. Many of the children in my district, especially those who come from underserved backgrounds, rely on Head Start programs for quality education, nutrition, and health services. These programs help children in poverty, those coming from foster care, or experiencing homelessness. In addition, these programs also help their families, providing their parents or guardians with employment and educational support.

Individuals with disabilities also require and deserve federal funding and support. That is why I support robust funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Funding for this program would help states and local school districts that consistently have access to limited resources be able to better provide support for their disabled students.

Finally, my district includes a lot of seniors, who rely on Social Security and the Social Security Administration (SSA) for their pensions and living expenses. Robust funding for SSA would provide vital income for retirees, workers who have experienced injury or illness, and families who have lost their head of household. Protecting Social Security is a must, as it is the cornerstone of American economic safety.

Together, these requests have the potential to transform the lives of hard-working families, children, veterans, seniors, and other vulnerable communities in my district and across our nation.

I look forward to working with all the Members of the Subcommittee in advancing these priorities that are not only important to my district, but also to working families, children, and seniors across our great nation.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Other than that, I think that is all of our witnesses that is in the queue, and that, we will adjourn.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[Whereupon, at 11:05 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

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