



Overview:

On Wednesday, November 17, 2021, from 10:15AM – 1:30PM ET, the Education and Labor Committee held a hearing titled “Examining the Implementation of COVID-19 Education Funds.” Watch the full hearing [here](#). Opening statements were made by **Rep. Frederica S. Wilson** (D- FL) and **Rep. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan** (D - Northern Mariana Islands). Notable Representatives that participated in the Q&A included; **Rep. Mark Takano** (D-CA), **Rep. Bob Good** (R-VA), **Rep. Elise Stefanik** (R-NY), **Rep. Jahana Hayes** (D-CT), and **Rep. Fred Keller** (R-PA). During the hearing the Department of Education’s witnesses discussed the plans to ensure states, school districts, and institutions of higher education used the Education Stabilization Fund as Congress intended. Mr. Kvaal and Ms. Marten discussed their plans to continue strengthening oversight and ensuring that investments provide students access to a safe, affordable, and quality education.

Opening Statements:

Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (D - Northern Mariana Islands), discussed how the nation’s K-12 schools and institutions of higher education are using the Education Stabilization Fund, including in the American Rescue Plan, to weather the pandemic and keep students learning. In response, Congress has provided an historic level of funding to help states and school districts reopen schools safely and get students back into the classroom. The American Rescue Plan funding was the single largest investment in K-12 schooling that the federal government has ever made. But we also provided support for schools and school staff and students in the CARES Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, totaling nearly \$200 billion in total for K-12.

Rep. Frederica S. Wilson (D- FL), discussed the economic fallout from COVID-19 and how it has exacerbated the challenges students and institutions face. In response, Congress provided more than \$75 billion in funding to institutions through three COVID-19 relief bills, including the American Rescue Plan Act. Importantly, institutions were required to use at least half of the funding they received to provide emergency financial aid grants personally to students. For institutions, the American Rescue Plan funding helped offset revenue losses and supported efforts to test for, track, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Testimony:

The Honorable Cindy Marten, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Education began her opening statement by discussing President Biden and the Department’s clear objective: getting students back in school, in-person full time, and "building back better." This includes efforts to continue to develop and refine resources, guidance, and support mechanisms to meet the needs of students and educators. During her opening statement she brought up four important points in supporting the U.S. Department of Education; funding, COVID-19 prevention strategies,

evidence-based interventions, and stakeholder engagement and education. To fully recover from the pandemic effectively the Department must listen to educators, localities, and states, and meet their needs for the long term.

The Honorable James Kvaal, Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, discussed the challenges facing students and colleges, the impact of the higher education emergency relief fund, continuing challenges of an equitable recovery, and helping colleges. Due to the decisive actions by Congress and the President, HEER Funds have made a difference in the lives of college students and the post-secondary institutions that serve them. There will be new investments in Pell Grants and college affordability. The Department is helping student loan borrowers by forgiving more than \$12B in loans and making new investments in community colleges and other inclusive institutions that provide equitable opportunities for graduation, careers, and upward mobility.

Q&A:

Many of the questions that were asked were related to data about funding distribution. **Rep. Gregorio Sablan** (D-Northern Mariana Islands) asked if the Department ensures the state departments are consistent with the law and what is the Department's plan for ongoing monitoring of the States and Districts to implement their plan to ensure continued compliance. **Ms. Marten** stated that the Department's plan has been approved for the States. Their immediate attention would be towards health, safety, and academics. She shared that monitoring is an ongoing process and that it focuses on certain locations of states that require attention.

Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA) noted that Congress has provided three large infusions of money into higher education through the CARES Act, CRRSA, and the American Rescue Plan, totaling more than \$76B. He then asked if HEER Funds have been used to support students and ensure the health and safety of the students on the campus community. **Mr. Kvaal** responded by explaining how HEER Funds made a difference for students. The scholarships that were offered to students assisted them in continuing their education and surviving the pandemic technology wise. They were able to keep staff and faculty employed. Funds are also used to institute public health measures on campus and in their communities, allocating funds for case managers and helping students deal with mental health challenges.

Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY) stated that in the beginning of the pandemic the state of New York received \$1M from the Bipartisan CARES Act, which was later offset. She asked how the Department is enforcing the maintenance on effort requirements that accompany the COVID-19 relief funds to ensure that funding is not captured by states. In **Ms. Marten's** response, she shared that the implementation of the law is critical, including working with state officials to ensure funds are distributed properly.

Rep. Bob Good (R-VA) stated that only 2% of the \$111B of COVID relief funding has been used for elementary and secondary schools. Criticizing the overspending of the Democrats, he questioned how future funding affects schools. **Ms. Marten** stated that the remainder of the funds would be used for social and mental health needs and physical safety. Their goal is to have schools be open and stay open.

Next, **Ranking Member Virginia Foxx** (R-NC) requested the FSA's student loan value report along with accompanying and relevant reports.

Rep. Jahana Hayes (D-CT) restated that K-12 schools received significant funds through the CARES Act and American Rescue Plan. She then asked what safeguards are used to prevent the

misuse of education stabilization funds and has it been identified if any states or localities have misused funds. **Ms. Marten** stated they are engaged in ongoing monitoring. If there is misuse, then the Department will go in and try to understand reason for the misuse. Having the transparency portal helps clarify where and how the money is being spent.

Rep. Fred Keller (R-PA) asked how the department is monitoring the allocation of funds. **Mr. Kvaal** recounted that they are making sure institutions are eligible, audit requirements, and signatures by executives to confirm they are aware of the terms and conditions.

Chair Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) asked what data the department has collected about how states and districts are using the American rescue Plan. **Ms. Marten** responded that the programs of state plans offer a glimpse in how they are using their funds and if it is being utilized for the intended reason. Social and emotional needs of students, who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, are areas where the funds need to be placed.