The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S. 128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S. 128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

June 8, 2016

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Mikulski:

The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) and 43 of its Federated State Associations are writing to request that the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations provide appropriate and maximized funding for Title IV, Part A of the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), otherwise known as the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG). This new program is the result of a consolidation of more than 20 existing programs into a single formula-funded flexible block grant program.

For nearly fifteen years, students, educators, and parents faced the unintended consequences behind policies created under “No Child Left Behind,” which included frequently narrowed curricula that reduced engagement with critical subjects, such as music. The signage of ESSA marks a positive step forward for all students across the nation, focusing on what makes a student whole by embracing the intrinsic value of a “Well-Rounded Education,” which now includes music education as one part of the whole. The SSAEG program embodies this fundamental value, allowing school districts the opportunity to choose where to best spend their SSAEG dollar in order to provide access to a broad and rich curricula in which students desperately need for academic success, and in today’s workforce.

We are making this request because we believe the Senate’s latest proposed FY17 funding level for SSAEG is severely inadequate. Despite being the third largest authorized program within ESSA, the FY2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS) Appropriations Bill proposes only $300 million for the grant, which is less than one-fourth of its $1.65 billion authorized funding level that Congress agreed upon in a bipartisan manner. Significantly underfunding SSAEG not only undermines the greater flexibility that Congress had intended for states and districts in ESSA, but also endangers the program’s long-term success and would not allow schools to make meaningful investments in critical areas of need, such as school music programs. Under the proposed funding level, school districts would be forced to make difficult and unconscionable trade-offs between high-quality programs and fail to create a “Well-Rounded” course of study. We urge the Committee to pass an amendment to better match SSAEG’s authorized level of $1.65 billion and increase its funding.

In addition, we object to the President’s prescribed language that recommends turning SSAEG into a competitive grant program. A competitive program would significantly disadvantage smaller and more rural school districts that often lack the capacity to apply for funding at all. These same districts would benefit the most from the program, as they frequently serve students who are in most need, a population that has shown to perform better academically when exposed to a broad curriculum that includes music.
programs. Sufficiently funding SSAEG would eliminate any need for competitive targeting and increase local control over educational investments.

ESSA is a historic piece of legislation and we must ensure that it is properly funded within its first authorized year to guarantee a world-class education for our nation’s students. On behalf of music educators, students, and advocates across the nation, we urge you to appropriate as close to full funding as possible for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants. Thank you for your consideration and for your service to our nation’s students.

Sincerely,

The National Association for Music Education

State-Affiliated Organizations

Alabama Music Educators Association
Alaska Music Educators Association
Arizona Music Educators Association
Arkansas Music Educators Association
California Music Educators Association
Colorado Music Educators Association
Connecticut Music Educators Association
Delaware Music Educators Association
Florida Music Education Association
Georgia Music Educators Association
Hawaii Music Educators Association
Illinois Music Education Association
Indiana Music Education Association
Iowa Music Educators Association
Kansas Music Educators Association
Kentucky Music Educators Association
Louisiana Music Educators Association
Maine Music Educators Association
Maryland Music Educators Association
Massachusetts Music Educators Association
Michigan Music Education Association
Minnesota Music Educators Association

Mississippi Music Educators Association
Missouri Music Educators Association
Montana Music Educators Association
Nebraska Music Educators Association
New Hampshire Music Educators Association
New Jersey Music Educators Association
New Mexico Music Educators Association
New York State School Music Association
North Carolina Music Educators Association
North Dakota Music Educators Association
Ohio Music Education Association
Oklahoma Music Educators Association
Pennsylvania Music Educators Association
Rhode Island Music Education Association
South Carolina Music Educators Association
Tennessee Music Education Association
Vermont Music Educators Association
Washington Music Educators Association
West Virginia Music Educators Association
Wisconsin Music Educators Association
Wyoming Music Educators Association