



October 24, 2019

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairwoman
Subcommittee Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chairwoman
Subcommittee Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member
Subcommittee Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski, Ranking Member Udall, Chairwoman McCollum, and Ranking Member Joyce:

As president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), I write to thank you for your ongoing work on the FY2020 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill and urge support for APLU's priorities as you reconcile differences between House and Senate measures.

I further note how crucial it is for Congress to complete the appropriations process. Additional continuing resolutions will fail to capitalize on Congress' meaningful work in addressing budget caps while ceding the opportunity to make important increases to key investments in scientific research. Understanding that the House marked up their bills under a higher total funding level than what was passed through the bipartisan budget agreement in July, APLU respectfully urges that the strongest possible funding levels for important research programs prevail in the final bill.

APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities. Annually, APLU's 197 U.S. member campuses enroll 4.1 million undergraduates and 1.2 million graduate students, award 1.1 million degrees, employ 1.1 million faculty and staff, and conduct \$42.4 billion in university-based research.

In addition to expressing views on overall funding requests as detailed below, APLU is also greatly concerned with Senate report language for the Environmental Protection Agency's **Environmental Protection: National Priorities** program that specifically "excludes institutions of higher education" from competing in the grant process. We strongly disagree with this

language and do not see any compelling public policy rationale for such an exclusion. U.S. universities participated in the program for many years, providing vital research and outreach services that benefit localities, states, and the nation. Our nation's research universities have unique capacities to contribute. For many years, the Environmental Finance Center Network, made up of universities, successfully competed for grants through EPA's Office of Groundwater and Drinking Water to provide training and technical assistance to improve water quality and safe drinking water for small systems and private well owners. We appreciate that the House does not include exclusionary language and urge that a final measure ensures that all entities are able to compete for funding to perform these vital services for communities.

APLU appreciates both the House and Senate's rejection of the Administration's proposal to close the **National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)**. NEH is a vital source of funding for scholars and researchers whose work helps the public and policymakers better understand and address the social, economic, political, and cultural challenges facing our nation and world today. Competitively awarded grants support activities such as teacher training on humanities topics, the digitization of historical documents, and documentaries that cover critical periods of our nation's history. These programs provide a greater understanding of the societal questions that impact us all, fostering a more connected and vibrant society. We urge members to incorporate at least the House level of **\$167.5 million** in the final bill for this important agency.

Additionally, APLU thanks members for their continued support of the **Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Science and Technology (S&T)** and urges members to include at least the House's level of **\$728 million** in the final bill. EPA S&T funds an array of scientific research and technology development that is critical to informing constructive public health policy and educating the general public as well as enabling more cost-effective solutions to environmental and public health challenges. Through EPA S&T grants, university researchers are finding ways to improve nation's water and air quality, increase our chemical safety awareness, and enhance our national security. Within EPA S&T, APLU further advocates for EPA's successful STAR program which provides research grants and graduate fellowships to students and faculty at universities across the country, leveraging expertise from the academic community while simultaneously pioneering new technologies and strengthening the workforce pipeline.

Within the United States Geological Survey (USGS), we advocate for the House's level of **\$24 million for the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units (CRUs)**. Today, there are 40 CRUs in 38 states and each unit is a partnership among the USGS, a State natural resource agency, a host university, and the Wildlife Management Institute. CRU staff conduct research related to natural resources, educate graduate students, and serve as resources to professionals in the field. From better understanding the impact of invasive plants and species on our communities to making technological advances in motion sensor cameras, CRU research projects are having a positive impact on how we interact with the world around us.

APLU further requests within USGS that members incorporate the House's level of at least **\$10 million for Water Resource Research Institutes (WRI)**. Through the 54 WRIs located around the country at institutions of higher education, WRI faculty work with regional and local communities to solve water-related issues associated with stormwater management,

contaminated drinking water, and reclaimed water supplies. Researchers disseminate the knowledge and best-practices gained from studies to the public and practitioners, working towards ensuring a supply of high-quality water for future generations across the nation.

Lastly, APLU urges members to increase appropriations for the **Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP)** for FY2020. In September, APLU sent a [letter](#) to Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall requesting increased support for this program. For twenty years, the JFSP has provided leadership to the scientific community by identifying high-priority fire-science research needs. Despite tremendous losses the U.S. has faced from wildfires in recent years, the JFSP has seen a dramatic decline in funding, from nearly \$13 million in FY2016 to \$6 million in FY2019. We request support of at least the House level of **\$7 million** and urge members to consider restoring funding to \$16 million (through the USDA Forest Service's Wildland Fire Management and the Department of Interior Wildland Fire Management accounts). This increase would allow the critical research of this program to resume at a level more aligned with the current need.

Thank you for your consideration of APLU's requests as you work to reconcile differences and advance a final FY2020 appropriations measure.

Sincerely,



Peter McPherson
President, APLU

cc:

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Richard Shelby
House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey
Senate Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Patrick Leahy
House Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Kay Granger
Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies