

Conference Committee Approves Defense-Labor-HHS-Education Package; CR Introduced

On September 13, the House Appropriations Committee filed a two-bill appropriations “minibus” funding bill, which was approved by a joint House and Senate Conference Committee. The [Conference Report](#) includes FY19 funding for the Departments of Defense, Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education.

The legislation also includes a short-term continuing resolution (CR), which would provide continued funding to keep the federal government operating until all yearly appropriations funding bills can be signed into law. The CR extends current levels of funding for federal agencies until December 7, 2018.

The Labor-HHS-Education bill would provide nearly \$178.1 billion in discretionary funding, a \$1 billion increase over 2018. The Education Department would receive \$71.5 billion, a \$581 million increase.

The bill also includes the following higher education-related provisions:

- The maximum Pell Grant award is increased by \$100 to \$6,195, funded by a combination of discretionary and mandatory funds. The bill also includes a new provision rescinding \$600 million in unobligated discretionary balances previously appropriated for the Pell Grant program.
- The bill authorizes a program to allow borrowers diagnosed with cancer to defer their federal student loan payments — without accruing interest — during treatment and for six months after.
- Funding for TRIO and GEAR UP programs would be increased by \$50 million and \$10 million, respectively, bringing TRIO programs to a total of \$1.06 billion and GEAR UP to a total of \$360 million.
- The bill provides \$1.9 billion for career, technical, and adult education programs, an increase of nearly \$95 million over FY2018.
- The bill includes language, included in the FY18 omnibus, preventing the Education Department from moving forward with plans to decentralize some functions of its Budget Service Office.
- The bill provides for a \$350 million discretionary relief fund, also included in the FY18 omnibus, to help borrowers working in public and nonprofit sectors to discharge loans they had been paying for 10 years but that were in repayment plans ineligible for loan forgiveness.