May 21, 2019

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), I urge you to support the fiscal year (FY) 2020 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (CJS) appropriations bill. With members in communities across the nation serving in hundreds of different occupations—including law enforcement and youth services workers, court system employees and corrections officers—AFSCME members provide the vital services that make America happen.

In recent years, funding for non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs has failed to keep pace with inflation or the needs of our growing population, and AFSCME members that have dedicated their careers to public service are seeing their communities suffer. Our members understand that insufficient funding for CJS programs means that victims of domestic and sexual violence will not get the support they need, that the opioid epidemic will continue to destroy families and communities, and that youth involved in juvenile justice programs will not get the supervision and care that they need to improve their lives. Our members also understand insufficient funding for the decennial census would likely leave disadvantaged groups without fair representation in Congress and in state capitols, without their fair share of federal funds, and without important information necessary to make critical public policy decisions.

While we believe that even more resources will be needed in the coming years to reverse the damage caused by years of underinvestment, the CJS bill being considered by the House Appropriations Committee is a strong step in the right direction. Furthermore, the contrast between the legislation being considered by the committee and the FY 2020 budget proposed by President Trump could not be starker. While the proposed legislation includes significant increases for critical programs that will help Americans, President Trump is proposing draconian cuts that will do extraordinary harm to essential public services.

By providing an additional $9.78 billion in discretionary funding relative to FY 2019, the CJS bill being considered by the committee will make a positive difference in our country, strengthening our communities and ensuring that more people have access to quality public services. Among the benefits of this legislation which we support include:

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• An additional $5.02 billion for the Department of Commerce, including $8.45 billion for the Census Bureau to ensure an accurate 2020 decennial census;

• $501 million for grant programs to address the opioid epidemic, including funding for drug courts, treatment programs, and programs for at-risk youth;

• $3.4 billion for state and local law enforcement grants programs, including $582.5 million for Violence Against Women Act programs that support victims of domestic and sexual violence and help prevent these crimes from occurring, $530.25 million for Byrne Justice Assistance Grants that support the work of state and local governments in addressing the criminal justice challenges most important to their communities, $375 million for Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act grants, and $25 million for the Bulletproof Vests Grants Program to ensure that law enforcement officers have the proper equipment on the job; and

• $323 million for Community Oriented Policing Services programs that allow state and local governments to hire new officers and train them in community policing and implement new technologies and policing strategies.

The legislation being considered by the committee provides significant and much-needed funding increases that will support the work of AFSCME members and strengthen our communities, and we urge all members of the committee to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Scott Frey
Director of Federal Government Affairs

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