

Submitted Testimony for The United States Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs

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Agency: USAID, Development Assistance Account, Basic Education Programming

Chairman Graham and Ranking Member Leahy, I am pleased to testify on behalf of the Basic Education Coalition, a group of 27 humanitarian and development institutions and universities dedicated to ensuring that all the world's children receive a quality basic education. My name is Jerrold Keilson, I am the Vice President of International Policy, Practice & Systems Change at American Institutes of Research, and I am the Co-Chair of the Basic Education Coalition's Executive Board of Directors. The Coalition seeks to apply the best of U.S. knowledge and strategy in support of the education development goals of the U.S. Government. As dedicated partners of USAID with deep technical expertise in virtually every county in the developing world, we know that quality education provides students a path toward prosperous and peaceful lives.

We are deeply disturbed by President Trump's FY18 budget request for foreign assistance, including a 53% cut to basic education programming. This budget is a retreat from our American values and our position of global leadership. If enacted, it would eviscerate decades of diplomacy and development progress. The Coalition and our allies are additionally concerned with the President's proposal to terminate the development assistance account, which is the bedrock of U.S. investment to help the world's poorest individuals. **We believe it is critical that the development assistance account remain independent from other funds and other objectives and we encourage Congress to include language in the State, Foreign Ops Appropriations bill to strengthen and protect it.** While we are extremely concerned by the President's proposed changes to foreign assistance, we are confident that Congress will continue the legacy of bipartisan support for the world's children.

We wish to thank the Committee for continued support for international basic education programs. We are appreciative of Congress' bipartisan support for the Reinforcing Education Accountability in Development (READ) Act, and we look forward to its passage. We reaffirm that basic education does more than provide children with literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills- it is a cost effective powerful determinant of sustainable economic growth that provides the foundation for democracy and political stability. **For fiscal year 2018, the Coalition recommends that the Committee allocates a U.S. investment of \$925 million towards USAID Basic Education programming, with at least \$800 million of that amount dedicated to the development assistance account.** This represents less than one tenth of one percent of the national budget, yet pays dividends in diplomacy and emerging markets for U.S. trade.

I have seen those dividends firsthand. I have worked in International Development for over 35 years, as a Foreign Service officer in Mexico, Australia, and Mauritania, and as a manager of education programs in approximately 30 countries around the world. A year ago, I visited schools in a poor farming community in northeastern Zambia. The difference between schools supported by international organizations and those without support was startling. Schools in the program we are administering have individual desks for students, with one book for each student, and sufficient supplies. Students in other schools lack these basic learning resources. As a result of this single program, close to 10,000 children are learning to read, write, learn math and science. Social challenges, such as teen marriages, are in steep decline. Boys and girls in these rural communities now aspire to be teachers, health workers, or businesspeople.

Programs such as these are being implemented with the support of USAID and private donors around the

world, and they are helping to create the next generation of leaders. Currently, 26% of the world's 7.4 billion persons are under the age of 15 and the vast majority live in less developed countries¹. A dollar invested in an additional year of schooling for these children generates ten dollars in benefits to low-income countries² and provides young people the opportunity to lift themselves and their families out of the intergenerational cycle of poverty. With education, these children will not only be more financially self-sufficient, they will be more democratic. According to a study of 18 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, people of voting age with primary education were 1.5 times more likely to support democracy than people with no education, and twice as likely to do so if they had completed secondary education³.

The recent progress report on USAID's 2011-2015 Education Strategy has shown that the U.S. Government can be fiscally responsible and follow the compelling social, economic, and moral callings for global education assistance. From 2011-2015, USAID and partners implemented 151 basic education programs in 45 countries, directly benefiting more than 41.6 million children and youth. Global literacy rates are up 33% worldwide in the last 25 years and primary school enrollment rates have tripled in that period⁴. Successful cross-sector efforts, such as the McGovern-Dole program, integrate health, nutrition, and education interventions that enable children to reach their full potential.

Both Republican and Democratic administrations have recognized that improving global education is not only in agreement with, but vital to our American values and interests. Basic education attainment slows the rate of population growth, stems the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases and promotes equality between men and women⁵. In countries wracked by crisis and conflict, introduction of fair and inclusive education provides stability and imparts skills and attitudes supportive of conflict prevention and peace building. As the world grows increasingly interconnected, expanding access to quality education is the best way to ensure stability and prosperity for all.

The Basic Education Coalition looks forward to working with the Subcommittee and Congress, to ensure that quality basic education remains a pillar of our foreign diplomacy. Thank you for your continued support and for your consideration of our request.

¹ Population Reference Bureau, 2016

² The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, 2016

³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014

⁴ US Agency for International Development, 2016

⁵ Murray, 2015; Mondal & Shitan, 2013; Sperling & Winthrop, 2016