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July 26, 2021

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

For many years, the Secretary of Education has published in the Federal Register a list of “secretary priorities” for all discretionary grant programs or, in some cases, specific grant programs. These priorities reflect the policy goals of the Secretary outside of the legislative process. We write today to request information on the use of these priorities, as it is important that taxpayers understand how their dollars are being spent.

There is little information publicly and readily available on these priorities, such as how often priorities are published, how often the priorities are used in grant announcements, and how often the use of priorities results in shifting awards to various grantees. Congress requires this information to fully understand how the programs are being implemented and to ensure taxpayer dollars are utilized as Congress intended.

Therefore, we request that the Government Accountability Office conduct a review of the use of secretary priorities, going back at least 15 years to ensure the review captures multiple administrations of both parties. The review should include discretionary grants that are awarded to State Educational Agencies and grants that are awarded to other entities directly, such as awards made through the Charter School Program. Where the statutory language may invite secretarial priorities, it would also be helpful to better understand the context for the use of such priorities. Finally, the review should include the statutory authority cited by the Secretary when publishing the priorities or clarify if the Secretary did not state such authority.

Thank you for your attention to this request. If you have any questions, please contact Mandy Schaumburg of the Committee staff at 202-225-6558 or mandy.schaumburg@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on
Education and Labor



Burgess Owens
Member of Congress



Gregory F. Murphy, M.D
Member of Congress