

# LEARNING FORWARD MEMBERS DELIVER PROCLAMATION TO CAPITOL HILL

BY MELINDA GEORGE AND JON BERNSTEIN

Leaders from Learning Forward affiliates in Virginia and New England joined Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh in Washington, D.C., in February to deliver a message to lawmakers about the importance of federal support for professional learning.

The group delivered Learning Forward's Proclamation for Professional Learning to the offices of senators and representatives from Virginia and Connecticut. The proclamation, signed by more than 1,700 Learning Forward members and stakeholders, states that professional learning is essential to improving teacher practice and student outcomes.

The proclamation calls on policymakers to support funding for effective, job-embedded professional learning that aligns with the definition included in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The participation of affiliate leaders as advocates was critical because their Congressional delegations include individuals with influence over Title II-A oversight and funding: Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., chair of the Education and Labor Committee; Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee; Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., chair of the Labor, Health, Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee; and Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., a member of both the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and Appropriations Committees.



Learning Forward leaders gather on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., to deliver the Proclamation for Professional Learning to policymakers. From left: Stephanie Hirsh, Elizabeth Foster, Lesley Hughes, Barbara Patterson Oden, Judy Newhouse, Esther Bobowick, Sue Renehan, and Melinda George.

Policymakers heard from educators how Title II-A dollars impact teaching and learning in their districts. The Learning Forward teams offered to act as ready resources for more information, site visits, and examples of effective Title II-A spending. Each office also received a copy of the Learning Forward Proclamation for Professional Learning with signatures from educators across the country.

The meetings allowed advocates to focus the attention of Congressional

members and their staffs on the importance of adequately funding Title II-A. After the Connecticut educators traded information and stories with a member of Murphy's staff, the staff person said she would take a deeper look at Title II-A funding this year.

The education fellow in Kaine's office affirmed his support of Title II-A and said he appreciated having data from the districts for Kaine to use when making the case on Capitol Hill. DeLauro also expressed appreciation for

the advocates' work and willingness to come to Washington to tell their stories and press for funding.

A staff person for Scott said there was a possibility of her office's support if Learning Forward hosts a future briefing about how professional learning is implemented and evidence of its effectiveness.

The meetings also yielded useful insights into funding for this year. While initial House Education and Labor Committee hearings will focus on school construction, there may be interest in Every Student Succeeds Act oversight hearings, including one on elevating the teaching profession. In a similar vein, DeLauro's staff said they might be interested in having issue-specific hearings later in the year.

Finally, we heard in a number of the meetings that Congress is interested in how professional development is being used to support teachers as they address students' social and emotional learning.

We recognize and appreciate the time our advocates invested in preparing for the visits as they honed their presentations and data to share. For example, Learning Forward Virginia advocates developed one-page summaries on the use of Title II-A funds in their districts.

The summaries included how much Title II-A funding was allocated to their district (including the decline in Title II-A funds over the last five years), what they used the funds to accomplish, and data that provided evidence that the use of the funds yielded results in student outcomes, school accreditation, and teacher retention.

While Title II-A received level funding during the fiscal 2019 appropriations process, we are now focused on the fiscal 2020 appropriations process. The process began in early March with the president's proposed budget that once

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again called for the elimination of all funding for Title II-A. As we write this, a divided Congress is wrestling with uncertain spending allocations and leaders from both political parties are expressing displeasure with spending decisions. Educators will need to be louder and more persistent to have our case heard.

To help educator advocates, Learning Forward will provide ongoing updates about the appropriations process as well as opportunities for our community to get involved. These include:

- Virtual and in-person workshops on telling your state, district, or school Title II-A story, including impact data;
- Sample emails and tweets for stakeholders;
- Updated talking points on spending caps and Title II-A; and
- Regular advocacy webinars to keep you up to date.

To be notified of these opportunities, sign up to receive updates from Learning Forward's A-Team at [learningforward.org/advocacy/sign-up](https://learningforward.org/advocacy/sign-up).

We look forward to engaging all educator advocates in this critical work.

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## **AFFILIATES LEARNING TOGETHER WITH WEBINARS**

Learning Forward Affiliates further the organization's mission in their work across the U.S., Canada, and internationally, reaching thousands of committed professional learning advocates and implementers throughout the year through conferences, workshops, book studies, online courses, and more.

To support the work of the affiliates, Learning Forward hosts webinars that provide information about affiliate operations, ongoing capacity-building efforts, organizational priorities, and other relevant content that can be adapted and localized.

In February, Learning Forward COO Michael Lanham and consulting attorney Nancy Greiwe held a webinar about affiliate operations, addressing the legal and financial requirements, tax filings, and record-keeping that ensure affiliates are healthy and in good standing. They answered specific questions from affiliate leaders and showed how to complete relevant documents in clear language.

A webinar in March focused on affiliates' advocacy work, including visits to Congressional representatives on Capitol Hill. It also covered how highlighting data about Title II-A expenditures and their impact can drive future efforts to advocate for resources and support.

Contact Elizabeth Foster ([elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org](mailto:elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org)) or Niki Gamble ([niki.gamble@learningforward.org](mailto:niki.gamble@learningforward.org)) with ideas for future webinars. For information about affiliates, visit [learningforward.org/affiliates](https://learningforward.org/affiliates).