



BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

March 3, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

I am writing to ask that you include S.2024, the USA Civics Act of 2019 in the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

As you know, the American History for Freedom Program authorizes grants to academic programs and centers focused on American history and free institutions, and other topics that are essential to preparing students for engaged and knowledgeable citizenship and civic leadership. These grants will allow academic programs and centers to develop programs of study, courses, lecture series, research, and symposia. In addition, the program provides for grants to prepare the next generation of K-12 teachers to teach civics and history and to deepen current teachers' knowledge of these essential subjects.

The program addresses an alarming deficit in civic understanding. Too often today, students take their reference point from the polarized politics of recent years, and they doubt whether our political institutions are adequate to the task of overcoming our divisions. Through this program, students will have opportunities to learn about how our country has succeeded in overcoming divisions and the ways in which our Constitution, democratic traditions, and free institutions have enabled our country to meet economic, social, and scientific challenges. By equipping students with the historical knowledge in which to contextualize current affairs and an understanding of the ways in which our institutions can address today's challenges, this program will prepare students to move past polarization and restore our traditions of civility, mutual respect, and pragmatic compromise.

I hope you will consider including this program in the HEA reauthorization. I would welcome the opportunity to talk with you about the potential value this program could bring to students across the country.

Yours cordially,

Jacqueline Pfeffer Merrill
Director, Campus Free Expression Project
Bipartisan Policy Center