



Durbin, King, Smith secure \$5 million for competitive grants supporting open textbooks in FY19 funding bill

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Angus King (I-ME) and Tina Smith (D-MN) today applauded the inclusion of a provision allocating \$5 million in additional funding for the continued implementation of the Open Textbooks Pilot in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Department of Defense, Department of Labor, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Education Appropriations package. The Open Textbooks Pilot, based on the Senator’s [Affordable College Textbook Act](#), is a competitive grant program to support the creation and expand the use of open college textbooks—textbooks that are available under an open license, allowing professors, students, researchers, and others to freely access the materials.

“Textbooks are one of the most overlooked upfront costs of going to college and create an unnecessary barrier to a good education,” Durbin said. “With its continued support of \$5 million to fund the Open Textbooks Pilot, Congress has made it a priority to give students and families across the country relief from the high costs of college textbooks. Along with my colleagues, I’ll continue to press Secretary DeVos to effectively implement this program and ensure that the Department of Education respects the promise to our constituents that this appropriation represents.”

“College is expensive enough – textbooks shouldn’t drive the price even higher,” said Senator King. “The Open Textbooks Pilot is an important opportunity to expand the use of free educational resources at schools across the country, making sure that students have affordable access to the tools they need to succeed.”

“There are many students in Minnesota and across the country who’ve worked hard, earned good grades, figured out a way to pay for college—who are then hit by the unexpectedly high cost of textbooks,” said Sen. Smith, a member of the Senate Education Committee. “This is an opportunity for us to help students save money by

securing resources to provide students free, open access textbooks. I'm glad that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle could come together to support the Open Textbooks Pilot because this is one of the many steps we can take to make college more affordable."

In April, Durbin, King, and Smith led 23 of their Senate Democratic colleagues in a letter to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-H) pressing them to provide additional funding for the program in the FY19 funding bill.

The program was created with an initial \$5 million investment, secured by Durbin, in the FY18 Omnibus. The Department is in the process of reviewing applications for FY18 grants under the Pilot and is expected to announce the first awards soon.

Durbin, King, and Smith, along with Representatives Jared Polis (D-CO) and Kirsten Sinema (D-AZ) in the House, have been working to ensure the program is effectively implemented by the Department of Education – sending letters to Secretary Betsy DeVos in [April](#) and [August](#). Today's bill also includes report language to ensure that the Department:

- Awards FY19 funds through a new grant competition;
- Uses the funds to provide a greater number of grants in FY19 – at least 20 grants with individual grants amounting to \$100,000 to \$1 million;
- Provides institutions at least 60 days to apply for grant funds; and
- Requires any tools, technologies, or other resources developed with grant funds for use with an open textbooks to also be open and freely available.

The College Board estimates that the average student at a four-year public institution of higher education should budget \$1,250 for college books and supplies during the 2017-18 academic year and \$1,420 for students at community colleges. According to a survey by U.S. Public Interest Research Groups (PIRG), 65 percent of students decided not to buy a textbook because of the cost and 94 percent of those students worried it would negatively affect their grade.