

Durbin, Colleagues Urge Department Of Education, OMB To Prioritize Funding For Open Textbook Pilot In Fiscal Year 2025

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), along with U.S. Senators Angus King (I-ME) and Tina Smith (D-MN), today led ten of their colleagues in sending a letter to the Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Shalanda Young, urging the agency leaders to include strong funding for the Open Textbooks Pilot (Pilot) in the Biden Administration’s Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) budget request.

The Pilot, based on Durbin's [*Affordable College Textbook Act*](#), is a competitive grant program to support the creation and expansion of open college textbooks – textbooks that are freely available under an open license, allowing professors, students, researchers, and others to freely access the materials. The grant program aims to significantly reduce the cost of higher education for students.

The Senators began their letter by emphasizing the importance of open textbooks and how they lower financial barriers to accessing higher education. According to the College Board, the average student at a four-year public college spends roughly \$1,240 on books and class supplies. Additionally, U.S. PIRG found in a 2020 survey that 65 percent of students skipped buying a textbook because of the cost, and 90 percent of those students were worried it would affect their grade negatively.

“As the cost of college continues to rise, it is crucial to ensure college is affordable for all students. With a single textbook potentially costing hundreds of dollars, textbook costs, unlike tuition and other college costs, are often overlooked. However, they can create an unnecessary barrier to attaining a college education,” the Senators wrote. “The high cost of textbooks disproportionately impacts low-income students and students of color who are unable to purchase required course materials, placing them at an academic disadvantage.”

The Senators reminded Secretary Cardona and Director Young that open textbooks offer benefits to students and faculty while promoting competition in the textbook market.

“Open textbooks—education resources that are licensed under an open license and made available free of charge to the public—offer quality, cost-effective alternatives to traditional textbooks. When open textbooks are used, students save money. Further, faculty members have greater flexibility to adapt and customize materials to meet their specific needs. The expanded use of open textbooks also has the potential to promote healthy competition in the traditional textbook market, which would reduce prices overall,” the Senators wrote in the letter.

The Senators concluded their letter, highlighting the popularity of open textbook programs and urging the Biden Administration to consider the Pilot as a strong priority while drafting the FY25 budget.

“Colleges and universities increasingly are seeking to utilize open textbooks programs, such as those supported by the Pilot. Since the creation of the Pilot in FY 2018, the Department of Education has received 69 applications for projects while only being able to fund 18 projects. Further, programs supported by the Pilot are estimated to have saved students \$250 million,” the lawmakers wrote. “Additional funding would increase these savings for students.”

“We urge you to continue to work to make college affordable for students by including robust funding for the Pilot in the Administration’s FY 2025 budget request,” the letter concluded.

Joining Durbin, King, and Smith in sending today’s letter were U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Alex Padilla (D-CA), and Peter Welch (D-VT).

Over the last six years, Durbin has secured \$50 million for his Open Textbook Pilot Program.

A copy of the letter is available [here](#).