

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY: JUNE 2020

CIVIL RIGHTS / POLICE BRUTALITY

George Floyd struggled for his life for 8 minutes and 46 seconds as a police officer thrust a knee against his neck, maintaining the pressure even as he repeatedly said, “I can’t breathe” and bled on the ground. Americans saw what happened with their own eyes—bystanders recorded it on their cell phones—and responded with an outpouring of anger and grief. Now, those emotions are fueling a renewed, long overdue push for racial justice and an end to the police brutality that disproportionately kills African Americans, especially African American men like George Floyd.

NEA joined hundreds of organizations in calling on Congress to take [swift and decisive legislative action](#). As a first step, we urged legislators to support H. Res. 988, introduced by Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), which condemns police brutality, racial profiling, and the use of excessive and militarized force while preserving civil rights, liberties, and protecting all people from police abuses. NEA also submitted comments for a June 10 House Judiciary Committee oversight hearing on [policing practices and law enforcement accountability](#).

We also urged lawmakers to support the [George Floyd Justice in Policing Act \(S. 3912/H.R. 7120\)](#), which passed the House in a [236-131](#) bipartisan vote on June 25. Among other things, the bill would ban no-knock warrants, chokeholds like the one that killed George Floyd, racial and religious profiling, and transferring military-grade equipment to state and local law enforcement.

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has consigned the bill to the Senate’s legislative graveyard, where scores of NEA-supported bills passed by the House already languish.

COVID-19

[A new NEA analysis](#) and [state-by-state breakdown](#) released on June 10 showed that nearly 2 million education jobs—one-fifth of the public education workforce—could be lost if the Senate fails to help close growing state and local budget gaps caused by COVID-19. Financially struggling states and localities cannot make the costly changes necessary to [reopen schools safely](#) without federal help. Those changes include modifying classrooms, cafeterias, and school buses to permit social distancing; intensive instruction and support for students traumatized by the impact of the coronavirus on their families and communities; providing personal protective equipment (PPE) for students and educators; and more.

In [testimony](#) before the House Education and Labor Committee on June 15, NEA Vice President Becky Pringle stressed the urgent need for immediate action on the next coronavirus package.

In just three months, nearly half a million public education jobs have been lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “If this damage goes unchecked, nearly 2 million educators—one-fifth of the workforce—could lose their jobs over the next three years,” she said. By comparison, 300,000 education jobs were lost during the Great Recession of 2008.

The **HEROES Act** passed by the House on May 15 would provide \$915 billion in direct relief for state and local governments that can be used to pay vital workers such as educators and \$90 billion in additional education funding that could save more than 800,000 education jobs. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has refused to take up HEROES Act, claiming there’s no need for immediate action to address the mounting damage from COVID-19.

NEA’s priorities for the **next coronavirus package** include at least \$175 billion to stabilize education funding, at least \$4 billion to equip students with hot spots and devices to help narrow the digital divide and close the homework gap, at least \$56 million in directed funding for personal protective equipment, relief for student loan borrowers, and at least \$4 billion to protect voting rights and make voting by mail more widely available.

We continued to build support for our positions on the issues through Dear Colleague and sign-on letters:

- A June 2 letter urged House and Senate leadership to include language in the HEROES Act to prevent the creation of [private school voucher programs](#) and other mechanisms to funnel public dollars to private schools.
- A June 2 letter urged the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service to provide additional waivers and flexibility to ensure communities can safely meet the [nutrition needs](#) of the families hit hardest by the coronavirus crisis.
- A June 4 letter urged House and Senate leadership to pass legislation rescinding U.S. Department of Education guidance that misinterprets the apportionment of [equitable services funding](#) for non-public schools under the CARES Act.
- A June 11 letter urged a House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee to protect the [civil rights and privacy](#) of all persons, especially high-risk populations and communities of color, when deploying technology to address the coronavirus crisis.
- A June 11 letter urged a Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee to protect the [civil rights and privacy](#) of all persons, especially high-risk populations and communities of color, when deploying technology to address the coronavirus crisis.
- A June 18 letter urged Senate leadership to boost the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) benefits](#) to protect against food insecurity and limit human suffering during the coronavirus crisis.

- A June 19 letter urged Senate leadership to provide at least \$175 billion in dedicated funding to stabilize education funding and [help schools reopen safely](#).

NEA also submitted comments for the record for several hearings, including the:

- House Administration Committee, Elections Subcommittee's June 4 hearing, "[The Impact of COVID-19 on Voting Rights and Election Administration: Ensuring Safe and Fair Elections](#)"
- Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee's June 4 hearing, "[COVID-19: Going Back to College Safely](#)" and June 10 hearing, "[Going Back to School Safely](#)"
- House Oversight and Reform Committee's June 10 hearing, "[No Worker Left Behind: Supporting Essential Workers](#)"
- House Ways and Means Committee, Select Revenue Measures Subcommittee's June 18 hearing, "[Tax Relief to Support Workers and Families During the COVID-19 Recession](#)"
- Senate Committee on Energy and Commerce, Health Subcommittee's June 30 hearing, "[High Anxiety and Stress: Legislation to Improve Mental Health During Crisis](#)"

HIGHER EDUCATION

Rep. Susie Lee (D-NV) played a leading role in building support to try to override the president's veto of a congressional resolution that would overturn Education Secretary Betsy DeVos' revised [borrower defense rule](#) and protect students from unscrupulous for-profit colleges. Although a broad majority of the House voted YES, the veto override came up short—two-thirds must support it.

JUDICIARY

In a landmark 6-3 Supreme Court decision written by conservative Justice Neil Gorsuch, the Supreme Court ruled on June 15 that **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act applies to LGBTQ individuals**. "NEA is proud to have led a broad coalition including employer groups that filed a brief in support of LGBTQ rights, but it is even prouder of the LGBTQ educators and students who endured discrimination yet continued to stand up to fight for themselves, their co-workers and their students," said NEA President [Lily Eskelsen García](#).

In a second momentous decision issued June 17, the Supreme Court rejected the Trump administration's rationale for ending **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**, calling it "arbitrary and capricious" in the 5-4 majority opinion written by Chief Justice John Roberts. DACA protects 700,000 Dreamers from deportation, including 15,000 educators. "The victory means that these DACA recipients are safe, for now, from the threat of deportation and will continue to contribute to our nation's social fabric and economic engine in communities across

the country, especially now when we need them the most and beyond,” said NEA President [Lily Eskelsen García](#).

NEA strongly urged senators to VOTE NO on [Justin Walker’s nomination to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit](#), characterizing him as “a political and cultural warrior, not an impartial judge [who has] clearly demonstrated a commitment to using the courts to achieve political goals, not dispense equal justice.” Sens. Bob Casey (D-PA), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) [wrote an op-ed](#) urging their colleagues to vote against Walker’s nomination because he supports throwing out the Affordable Care Act and stripping tens of millions of Americans of their health coverage. Unfortunately, the Senate approved the nomination [51-42](#) on June 18.

SCHOOL MODERNIZATION

By a vote of [233-188](#), the House passed the [Moving Forward Act \(H.R. 2\)](#). It includes the **Reopen and Rebuild America’s Schools Act**, a schools infrastructure bill that would provide significant support for public schools and the students most in need. Specifically, the bill would create a \$100 billion grant program that targets high-poverty schools and a \$30 billion tax-credit bond program for repairing, renovating, and modernizing school facilities that pose health and safety risks to students and staff. It would also provide \$5 billion in funding to help narrow the digital divide and equip more students to go online. Nationwide, as many as 12 million students—1 in 5—are unable to do schoolwork at home due to lack of internet access.

MORE LEGISLATIVE NEWS*

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) proposed a [resolution](#) condemning the violation of peaceful demonstrators’ **First Amendment rights** by using gas and rubber bullets to disperse them on June 1 in Washington, DC. Majority Mitch McConnell (R-KY) killed the resolution.

The **Pandemic Responder Service Award Act (S. 3763/H.R. 6953)**, introduced by Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA) and Rep. Donna Shalala (D-FL), would create a GI-Bill style benefits program for healthcare workers fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

The House passed the **Washington, D.C. Admission Act (H.R. 51)** by a vote of [232-180](#) on June 25. The bill would make the District of Columbia our nation’s 51st state and give its 700,000 residents the right to [full representation in Congress](#).

**This list is a snapshot, not comprehensive*