



## The Consortium of State School Boards Associations Weekly Education Report

**DECEMBER 16, 2024**

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*The COSSBA Education Report*, a weekly publication, provides an executive summary of public policy issues affecting American K-12 education and employment. **Please use the bookmarks below to navigate to your area of interest:**

1. **News, Publications, & Updates on COSSBA Policy Priorities**
  - **IDEA**
    - **What Do Special Education Advocates Anticipate from a 2<sup>nd</sup> Trump Term?** Some advocacy groups are preparing to defend the federal government's role in supporting public school students with disabilities.
2. **Budget and Appropriations Wrap-up**
  - **Impact on State School Board Associations**
3. **In Brief – Last Week in Washington**
  - **LPI Hosts Legislative Prep Webinar on Eliminating Chronic Absenteeism:** On Tuesday, the Learning Policy Institute hosted a webinar on “Eliminating Chronic Absence” as part of its 2025 Legislative Prep Session webinar series.
  - **Experts Share Insights on Supporting Paths to College:** On Wednesday, the Center for Economic Security and Opportunity (CESO) hosted a webinar to present a new report reviewing over two decades of research on how best to support students with enrolling in and completing college.
  - **ITIF Examine Best Practices for Safeguarding Children Online:** On Wednesday, the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF) hosted a webinar titled, “How Should Congress Keep Children Safe Online?”
  - **Education Unions Rally on Capitol Hill for Social Security Fairness Act:** On Wednesday, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, National Education Association (NEA) Vice President Princess

Moss, union leaders, and lawmakers held a rally on Capitol Hill to urge a Senate vote on the **Social Security Fairness Act** (SSFA).

- **House Education Panel Examines AmeriCorps Fiscal Accountability:** On Wednesday, the House Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development held a hearing on the Fiscal Year 2024 AmeriCorps audit failure.
- **LPI Navigates Education Finance Challenges in Legislative Prep Webinar:** On Thursday, the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) hosted a webinar on “Emerging Topics in Education Finance” as part of its state legislative prep series.
- **President Biden Signs into Law the FAFSA Deadline Act:** On Thursday, President Joe Biden signed the FAFSA Deadline Act, establishing a mandatory October 1 release date for the federal student aid form.
- **Walberg Selected to Chair House Education and Workforce Committee:** It was announced Thursday evening that Congressman Tim Walberg (R-MI) was selected by the Republican Steering Committee to chair the House Education and the Workforce Committee, pending formal approval by the full GOP conference.

#### 4. **New Publications**

- **K-12 STEM Education and Workforce Development in Rural Areas**  
*National Academies (December 2024)*  
Rural areas can provide a rich context for learning science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), but these communities and the students in them are often overlooked in ongoing efforts to expand access to high-quality K-12 STEM education and workforce development.

#### 5. **In the News**

- **Walberg Bests Owens to Lead House Education and the Workforce Panel**  
*Politico (December 12, 2024)*
- **Teacher Diversity Lags Behind Rate in Broader Workforce**  
*Higher Ed Dive (December 12, 2024)*
- **Abolishing the Department of Education Will Not Be Easy**  
*The Hill (December 10, 2024)*
- **Thou Shalt Not Display the Ten Commandments in School?**  
*Education Next (December 10, 2024)*
- **Walberg and Owens Bring Different Experiences to Race for House Education Chair**  
*Roll Call (December 9, 2024)*
- **House to Release ‘Very Detailed’ AI Policy Plans, Obernolte Says**  
*Bloomberg Government (December 9, 2024)*

#### 6. **Weekly Calendar - What’s coming up this week?**

- **Update on Boston Parent Coalition Litigation:** The Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies will hold a virtual discussion on "Litigation Update: Boston Parent Coalition for Academic Excellence v. The School Committee for the City of Boston."  
*Monday at 1:30pm ET*

- **Equitable Grading: A Competency-Based Education Entry Point and Core Practice:** The Aurora Institute will hold a webinar on equitable grading and two learning communities that are changing how they communicate student learning.  
*Tuesday at 3pm ET*
- **Supporting School Principles: Considerations for States:** The Aspen Institute and National Association for State Boards of Education will hold a webinar to discuss recent reports to discuss ways to rethink and redefine the role of the principal, along with examples of innovation in practice.  
*Tuesday at 3pm ET*

## 7. **On The Floor of Congress This Week**

- **Senate floor**
  - **H.R.5009**, National Defense Authorization Act
  - **H.R.82**, Social Security Fairness Act
  - Legislation related to FY25 government spending is expected.
- **House floor**
  - **H.R. 115** – Midnight Rules Relief Act (Sponsored by Rep. Biggs / Judiciary Committee)
  - Legislation related to FY25 government spending is expected.

## 8. **Important U.S. House and Senate Links**

## 9. **About BPAG**

## 1. **COSSBA Policy Priorities**

### IDEA

#### WHAT DO SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVOCATES ANTICIPATE FROM A 2<sup>ND</sup> TRUMP TERM?

*K-12 Dive* (December 9, 2024)

Special education administrators and advocates are preparing for potential shifts in funding and programming under a second Trump administration, amidst pledges to reduce federal involvement in K-12 education. While there is bipartisan support for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its guarantee of free, appropriate public education for students with disabilities, significant concerns remain. [Read more.](#)

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## 2. **Budget and Appropriations Wrap-Up**

Congressional leaders and appropriators are working to avoid a federal government shutdown when the current continuing resolution (CR) expires on December 20<sup>th</sup>. Text of the new CR is now expected early this week and will fund federal agencies through early 2025. Most assume the stopgap measure will go through March, giving Republicans a few months to focus on [reconciliation](#)—including which presidential priorities to address in which order, and approving cabinet leadership nominees before facing another government funding crisis. Appropriators won't confirm or deny that timeline.

In addition to timing, negotiators are addressing the content of the bill. The CR will likely be among the last bills to reach President Joe Biden’s desk, and advocates for every cause are making their case for hitching a ride on that train.

While Congress is preparing for its work, incoming Education Department leadership is preparing to take over. They are interviewing candidates for “senior” positions this week, and those involved in the transition confirmed what has been reported—the Trump Administration is trying to get the people in place it needs to execute its priorities as soon as possible.

Change is in the air.

### **How does this impact State School Board Associations?**

It’s possible the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) could get a ride on the CR. While a number of senators placed holds on the update to workforce development programs, it has been reported that most of those concerns have been addressed. The Kids Online Safe Act (KOSA) doesn’t seem like a likely contender, given Speaker of the House Mike Johnson’s (R-LA) thoughts on the bill. There is also the matter of disaster relief funds, including investments in schools damaged by natural disasters earlier this year. While there is likely to be some money to help schools recover, it’s unlikely to be the \$1 billion the White House requested last month.

This week is the last of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress. As education advocates look to the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress, allies on Capitol Hill warn them to expect cuts and to prepare to activate local grassroots efforts when Republicans propose cuts. Such advocacy was very helpful when House Republicans proposed draconian cuts in the Fiscal Year 2024 spending process.

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### **3. In Brief – Last Week in Washington**

#### **LPI HOSTS LEGISLATIVE PREP WEBINAR ON ELIMINATING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

On Tuesday, the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) hosted a webinar on “Eliminating Chronic Absence” as part of its 2025 Legislative Prep Session webinar series. Designed to equip policymakers and stakeholders for the upcoming legislative session, the series is co-sponsored by the Education Commission of the States, the National Association of State Boards of Education, and the National Conference of State Legislatures. The panel featured a range of experts, including Michele L. Blatt, State Superintendent of West Virginia’s Department of Education; Hedy Chang, Executive Director at Attendance Works; Emily Germain and Laura E. Hernández, researchers at LPI; Roby Chatterji, senior policy advisor at LPI; and John Sena, Director of the Legislative Education Study Committee at the New Mexico Legislature. Laura Hernández opened the discussion by highlighting how chronic absenteeism nearly doubled during the pandemic, affecting entire school communities. She presented LPI’s strategies for combating absenteeism, which include improving family engagement, fostering student connectedness, systematically tracking attendance data, implementing tiered systems of support, building partnerships, and employing community school coordinators. Hedy Chang shared her research on chronic absence, emphasizing the importance of addressing root causes, such as barriers to attendance, student aversion, disengagement, and misconceptions. Emily Germain elaborated on how community schools have successfully tackled chronic absenteeism. She highlighted their comprehensive and proactive strategies, which include enhancing family engagement, strengthening student relationships, systematically tracking attendance, implementing tiered supports, and leveraging partnerships to

assist youth and families. Michele Blatt discussed West Virginia's legislative measures to combat chronic absenteeism, including revisions to state codes on excused absences and the integration of a multi-tiered system of support. Lastly, John Sena outlined New Mexico's initiatives, which include increased funding for career technical education, expanded behavioral and mental health support, and the implementation of attendance laws based on best practices. He also highlighted the [Attendance for Success Act](#), which shifted the state's focus from punitive measures to proactive, student-centered engagement strategies. The webinar underscored the importance of systemic, research-backed solutions to eliminate chronic absenteeism and improve student outcomes nationwide.

### **EXPERTS SHARE INSIGHTS ON SUPPORTING STUDENT PATHS TO COLLEGE**

On Wednesday, the Center for Economic Security and Opportunity (CESO) hosted a webinar to present a new report reviewing over two decades of research on how best to support students with enrolling in and completing college. The panel, composed of experts and stakeholders from higher education, addressed the persistent challenges students face in pursuing post-secondary education in a post-COVID world. With college enrollment and completion rates declining, the discussion centered on strategies to guide students toward success. One key issue highlighted was affordability. Many students are unsure whether they can afford college, a critical factor influencing their decision to apply. Brookings Senior Fellow Sarah Reber emphasized FAFSA limitations, noting, "Completing the FAFSA is not enough... students need to know how they will pay for college before it is time to apply or even earlier." Providing clarity about college costs upfront could significantly increase enrollment rates. Another focus was the role of intervention programs in helping students identify the best college options for their needs. These programs often include mentors, coaches, counselors, and other dedicated staff who provide tailored guidance to students. Despite their potential, funding remains a significant obstacle, limiting the scale and efficiency of these initiatives. Nevertheless, pilot programs in states like North Carolina have shown promise, demonstrating incremental improvements in enrollment and bachelor's degree completion rates. The panel also discussed the broader value of a college degree. While data supports the long-term benefits of earning a degree, panelists urged a broader approach to post-secondary education. They stressed the importance of introducing students to alternative pathways, such as trade programs and vocational schools, particularly for those deterred by college costs. Clear communication about these diverse opportunities is essential to ensure all students can access education that aligns with their goals and circumstances. A recording of the event is available [here](#).

### **ITIF EXAMINES BEST PRACTICES FOR SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN ONLINE**

On Wednesday, the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF) hosted a webinar titled, "How Should Congress Keep Children Safe Online?" The discussion centered on children's online safety legislation, particularly the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA), and examined the roles of parents, corporations, and regulators in shaping safe digital experiences for young users. Moderated by Learning Policy Institute (LPI) Policy Analyst Alex Ambrose, the webinar featured a panel of experts: Bailey Sanchez, Senior Counsel with the Future of Privacy Forum's US Legislation Team; Andrew Zack from the Family Online Safety Institute; Shae Gardner from LGBT Tech; and John Mootz from the Institute of Digital Media and Child Development. Bailey Sanchez provided updates on KOSA, focusing on how the legislation addresses mental health and addiction-related harms by imposing a duty of care on social platforms, akin to consumer data

privacy laws. While highlighting KOSA's potential to mitigate modern online risks, Sanchez expressed skepticism about the practicality of age assurance policies. Andrew Zack discussed KOSA's progress toward becoming law after three years of advocacy. He emphasized the importance of accessible parental controls and the need for youth-led voices in shaping policies, cautioning lawmakers to consider unintended consequences that might arise from the legislation. Shae Gardner raised concerns about protecting LGBTQ+ youth online, criticizing the vagueness of KOSA and its potential impact on user curation tools. Gardner called for platforms to combat hate speech effectively without limiting user autonomy and stressed the value of educating users about online tools. John Mootz highlighted the necessity of research-driven policy, focusing on the implementation challenges of KOSA's duty of care concept in the United States. He pointed to international examples, such as the UK's age-appropriate design codes, as models for addressing mental health issues linked to social media use. Mootz cautioned that an overly broad duty of care could be unenforceable and called for more targeted research to inform effective regulation. Throughout the webinar, the panelists underscored the need for thoughtful, research-based legislation that prioritizes children's safety while considering diverse perspectives. They emphasized the importance of including youth voices in the legislative process to ensure policies are both effective and equitable.

#### **EDUCATION UNIONS RALLY ON CAPITOL HILL FOR SOCIAL SECURITY FAIRNESS ACT**

On Wednesday, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, National Education Association (NEA) Vice President Princess Moss, union leaders, and lawmakers held a rally on Capitol Hill to urge a Senate vote on the Social Security Fairness Act (SSFA). The bipartisan legislation seeks to repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO), which advocates argue reduces Social Security benefits for over 2 million retirees, including teachers, firefighters, police officers, and other public service workers. The bill passed the House on November 12, and by late afternoon on Thursday this past week, following the Wednesday rally, Senator Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) announced that his chamber would advance the bill toward a vote before the end of the lame-duck session. While the legislation has strong bipartisan support, it might still face some hurdles. Some Republicans, including Senator Mike Braun (R-IN), expressed concerns about the bill's \$195 billion cost over 10 years and its impact on the Social Security Trust Fund, which could accelerate insolvency by six months. Critics argue the reform should be part of a broader Social Security overhaul. Despite fiscal concerns, proponents argue the bill addresses long-standing injustices that penalize public servants and their families, ensuring they receive their earned benefits. Last month, when the bill exited the House, Weingarten highlighted the importance of ensuring Social Security benefits for those who contribute, calling the provisions unfair penalties that undermine retirement security. AFT Rhode Island Retiree Chapter President Roger Boudreau emphasized the bill's significance for nearly 3 million retirees whose benefits have been cut and over 6 million current workers who would have faced similar penalties in the future. The SSFA could be on the Senate floor this week.

#### **HOUSE EDUCATION PANEL EXAMINES AMERICORPS FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

On Wednesday, the House Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development held a hearing on the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) AmeriCorps audit failure. The congressional hearing on AmeriCorps' fiscal accountability highlighted a divide in perspectives between Republicans and Democrats. Subcommittee Chair Burgess Owens (R-UT)

and others criticized AmeriCorps for failing audits for eight consecutive years, citing poor financial management, inability to detect fraud, and misuse of taxpayer dollars. Owens suggested the program requires drastic reform or elimination. Subcommittee Ranking Member Frederica Wilson (D-FL) and other Democrats defended AmeriCorps, emphasizing its positive impact on communities through disaster recovery, education, and civic engagement, while acknowledging financial challenges. AmeriCorps CEO Michael Smith outlined ongoing reforms and progress, including closing audit recommendations, modernizing systems, and addressing weaknesses. AmeriCorps Acting Inspector General Stephen Ravas detailed systemic issues and urged stronger fraud prevention measures and financial oversight. Committee members and the two witnesses debated whether to continue funding AmeriCorps amid its financial mismanagement, reflecting broader partisan views on the program's role and efficiency. A recording of the hearing, witness testimony, and a hearing recap prepared by Republican committee staff can be found [here](#).

### **LPI NAVIGATES EDUCATION FINANCE CHALLENGES IN LEGISLATIVE PREP WEBINAR**

On Thursday, the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) hosted a webinar on “Emerging Topics in Education Finance” as part of its state legislative prep series. With the 2025 state legislative sessions approaching, the discussion provided critical insights into the financial and policy challenges facing education, particularly the impending expiration of federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding. With ESSER funds expiring, state and local schools say they are facing significant financial instability. The discussion underscored the challenges faced by vulnerable student populations, such as English Language Learners (ELLs) and low-income students, who are at greater risk of falling behind academically. A graph from LPI's presentation using data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed markedly low math and reading scores for these groups. According to an LPI report, 53.3 percent of students in the 2022-23 school year qualified for free or reduced-price lunches, 15.2 percent received special education services, 10.6 percent were ELLs, and 2 percent experienced homelessness. To address these disparities, panelists proposed strategies including improved identification of ELLs and students in poverty, adjustments to special education funding, and investments in programs to reduce student homelessness. Teacher workforce challenges were another focal point. While LPI's 2023-2024 study found that teacher compensation was the second most popular topic of enacted legislation nationwide, panelists emphasized the need for additional efforts to ensure adequate resources and equitable teacher participation across districts. The webinar emphasized the importance of targeted, equity-driven approaches to education finance to safeguard the needs of at-risk student populations and the broader school system in the years ahead.

### **PRESIDENT BIDEN SIGNS INTO LAW THE FAFSA DEADLINE ACT**

On Thursday, President Joe Biden signed the [FAFSA Deadline Act](#), establishing a mandatory October 1 release date for the federal student aid form. The bipartisan legislation was prompted by technical and data errors that plagued the Education Department's (ED) recent rollout of a revamped Federal Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), resulting in fewer low-income students completing the form. Looking ahead, future administrations must release the FAFSA by October 1 annually. By September 1 each year, the department must notify Congress if it will meet the deadline and, if not, appear before lawmakers by September 30. The House bill passed with overwhelming bipartisan support November 15, and the Senate followed soon after on November 21. Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA), sponsor of the Senate bill, criticized the Biden administration's handling of FAFSA and pledged to ensure its proper functionality as the incoming chair of the

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. Despite past issues, ED officials affirmed their readiness to return to the October 1 launch date for next year's FAFSA.

#### **WALBERG SELECTED TO CHAIR HOUSE EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE COMMITTEE**

It was announced Thursday evening that Congressman Tim Walberg (R-MI) was selected by the Republican Steering Committee to chair the House Education and the Workforce Committee, pending formal approval by the full GOP conference. Walberg, an eight-term congressman with over a decade of experience on the committee, defeated Congressman Burgess Owens (R-UT) for the position. Owens currently serves as Chair of the Higher Education and Workforce Development Subcommittee. This will be Walberg's first time leading a full committee. His priorities include strengthening the relationship between education and work, enhancing school choice, improving college affordability, expanding apprenticeships and internships, passing a short-term bipartisan Pell Grant bill, and reauthorizing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, if that effort is not successful before Congress leaves town. Walberg attributes his policy focus to his upbringing in Chicago, where his mother was a teacher and his father a union steelworker, as well as his own experience working as a union steelworker during college. Owens, a two-term committee member, also sought the chairmanship, emphasizing school choice, auditing the Education Department, and addressing diversity and inclusion initiatives. Democrats on the committee will continue to be led by Ranking Member Bobby Scott (D-VA), who has expressed optimism about bipartisan cooperation with Walberg. Both lawmakers have established a positive relationship through shared involvement in a prayer breakfast. Chairwoman Virginia Foxx (R-NC) also congratulated Walberg Thursday evening, saying, "I have no doubt that he'll hit the ground running and will work tirelessly to ensure students have the opportunity to learn and workers have the ability to succeed."

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#### **4. New Publications**

##### **K-12 STEM Education and Workforce Development in Rural Areas**

*National Academies* (December 2024)

Rural areas can provide a rich context for learning science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), but these communities and the students in them are often overlooked in ongoing efforts to expand access to high-quality K-12 STEM education and workforce development. Addressing barriers, often related to funding, and promoting unrecognized assets for STEM learning can enhance the ability of individuals in rural areas to further engage in and contribute to their communities or to broader scientific exploration and discovery.

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#### **5. In the News**

##### **Walberg Bests Owens to Lead House Education and the Workforce Panel**

*Politico* (December 12, 2024)

##### **Teacher Diversity Lags Behind Rate in Broader Workforce**

*Higher Ed Dive* (December 12, 2024)

##### **Abolishing the Department of Education Will Not Be Easy**

*The Hill* (December 10, 2024)



## Thou Shalt Not Display the Ten Commandments in School?

*Education Next* (December 10, 2024)

## Walberg and Owens Bring Different Experiences to Race for House Education Chair

*Roll Call* (December 9, 2024)

## House to Release ‘Very Detailed’ AI Policy Plans, Obernolte Says

*Bloomberg Government* (December 9, 2024)

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## THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON

### 6. Weekly Calendar

#### Monday, December 16, 2024

##### **Webinar: Update on Boston Parent Coalition Litigation**

**Subject:** The Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies will hold a virtual discussion on "Litigation Update: Boston Parent Coalition for Academic Excellence v. The School Committee for the City of Boston."

**Time:** 1:30 p.m.

**Contact:** Register [here.](#)

#### Tuesday, December 17, 2024

##### **Webinar: Equitable Grading: A Competency-Based Education Entry Point and Core Practice**

**Subject:** The Aurora Institute will hold a webinar on equitable grading, and two learning communities that are changing how they communicate student learning.

**Participants:** Joe Feldman, CEO, Crescendo Education Group; Sonal Patel, assistant superintendent of educational services, San Leandro Unified, CA; Jill Gurtner, principal, Clark Street Community School, WI; and Laurie Gagnon, competency works director, Aurora Institute.

**Time:** 3:00 p.m.

**Contact:** Register [here.](#)

##### **Webinar: Supporting School Principals: Considerations for States**

**Subject:** The Aspen Institute and National Association for State Boards of Education will hold a webinar to discuss recent reports to discuss ways to rethink and redefine the role of the principal, along with examples of innovation in practice.

**Time:** 3:00 p.m.

**Contact:** Register [here.](#)

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## 7. On The Floor of Congress This Week

### Senate Floor:

[H.R.5009](#), National Defense Authorization Act

[H.R.82](#), Social Security Fairness Act

*Legislation related to FY25 government spending is expected.*

### House Floor:

[H.R. 115](#) – Midnight Rules Relief Act (*Sponsored by Rep. Biggs / Judiciary Committee*)

*Legislation related to FY25 government spending is expected.*

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## 8. Links for Up-to-Date Information on Hearings, Legislation, and Events

[U.S. House and Senate 2024 Schedule](#)

[U.S. Department of Education](#)

[U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions](#)

[U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor](#)

[U.S. Senate Budget Committee](#)

[U.S. House Budget Committee](#)

[Congressional Budget Office](#)

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## 10. About BPAG

[Bose Public Affairs Group](#) is a full-service government affairs and public relations consulting firm that has built a reputation for producing results. We partner with clients committed to excellence in education and other social services to achieve policy and advocacy success by:

- leveraging our expertise and passion;
- strategizing intelligent solutions; and,
- Creating meaningful impact.

Our team includes long-term insiders in education policy from Pre-K through higher education, innovative thinkers and savvy strategists that provide a comprehensive array of customized client services. We have the knowledge, skills, and relationships that are necessary for successful advocacy at all levels. From grassroots to grass tops and everything in between, our broad-based legislative practice approaches every project with the same degree of determination and professionalism. BPAG provides expertise in a variety of services:

- Government Relations
- Research and Analysis
- Advocacy Training
- Association Management
- Strategic Communications
- Policy Events

For more information, please visit our [website](#).

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