REAUTHORIZE THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT
Protect Graduate Education in Communication Sciences and Disorders

ACTION REQUESTED
Ensure that proposals to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA), including the Student Aid Improvement Act (S. 2557) and the College Affordability Act (H.R. 4674), increase students’ ability to pursue graduate education in health care and education professions, like audiology and speech-language pathology, and protect the ability of programmatic accreditors to carry out their role.

ISSUE: Graduate Students and Programs in Health Professions Need Support
In order to attain a license to practice, audiologist (SLPs) must earn a master’s degree. A doctoral degree in audiology can range between $76,000-$150,000 and a master’s in speech-language pathology costs $23,000-$75,000 each year at a public university.1 Graduate students require access to adequate resources to secure the education they need to be successful in America’s workforce. Graduate programs must have the ability to educate and train more health care professionals to meet the growing need across all service delivery settings.

• The current federal financial aid application process is complicated and burdensome for students and families.
• Students and graduates need continued and expanded access to affordable solutions to pay for their graduate education including loan repayment and forgiveness programs.
• The value of programs should not be evaluated on items they do not control. Limited term loan repayment data that doesn’t account for the difference between loan deferral and loan default are poor accountability measures.

SOLUTION: Modernize HEA to Meet the Needs of Students and the Workforce
Congress must modernize the country’s higher education system for today’s students by improving access, affordability, and accountability for financial aid to help meet the growing demands for graduates in the health care and education sectors, particularly audiologists and SLPs. Congress should ensure that HEA reauthorization will:

• Streamline the federal student aid application process to enhance transparency for students and families.
• Ensure students seeking graduate degrees, including audiology or speech-language pathology, have access to adequate levels of federal student aid through remaining Pell Grant eligibility and subsidized federal loans.
• Expand funding and access to loan forgiveness programs, such as the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, for health care and school-based professionals to meet increased demand that is projected to grow 21% for audiologists and 18% for SLPs by 2026.2
• Maintain current eligibility requirements for programmatic accreditors without significant changes to administrative and fiscal structural requirements that may unintentionally harm students financially due to increased accreditation costs. Current requirements recognize the unique role programmatic accreditors play in ensuring educational programs produce qualified and competent practitioners.
• Ensure that accountability standards, such as gainful employment, are determined by a range of factors including prospects for and history of employment within the field, and that they continue to not be applied directly to programmatic accreditors.


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