



National Association for
College Admission Counseling

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February 23, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the National Association for College Admission Counseling, we appreciate your commitment to helping our nation's students reach their full academic potential and the opportunity to share our thoughts on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act ("HEA").

Founded in 1937, NACAC is an association of more than 16,000 members, including school counselors and college admission staff, who work with students making the transition from high school to postsecondary education ("college"). NACAC is committed to maintaining professional standards that foster ethical and social responsibility among those involved in the college application and enrollment process, as outlined in the NACAC's SPGP: Code of Ethics and Professional Practices, which may be accessed on our [website](#). Through our advocacy efforts, we are also dedicated to ensuring that all students have access to high quality school counseling to help them make informed decisions as they prepare for and pursue college or career.

As you know, the Higher Education Act was created with the intent of expanding opportunity and access to higher education for individuals across America, regardless of income or social class. NACAC urges the Committee to continue



this aspiration through this reauthorization as our nation and economy have benefited from the federal government's investment in higher education.

Need-Based Financial Aid

Investment in and support for the Pell Grant must be at the forefront of reauthorization discussions. Pell Grants play a critical role in improving access to higher education for students who come from low-income families. Increased funding for Pell Grants would help to reduce the financial burden that often deters these students from pursuing or obtaining a college degree. Unfortunately, Pell has failed to keep up with inflation. According to the College Board, the percentage of average public four-year in-state published tuition and fees covered by the maximum Pell Grant declined from 87% in 1997-98 to 70% in 2007-08 and to 59% in 2017-18. NACAC also supports robust investment in other need-based financial aid programs such as federal work-study, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants and others.

While NACAC remains open to Chairman Alexander's and others' call for consolidating the various federal student loan and grant programs, we urge the Committee to preserve some of the flexibility that the current system provides. We also urge the Committee to maintain (or increase) the overall level of funding currently available to federal financial aid programs, should it decide to consolidate programs.

Federal Student Loans

Additionally, NACAC recommends that the Higher Education Act include provisions that would improve financial aid counseling and transparency. Such measures should be tailored in ways that help to ensure students and families understand the enrollment and repayment processes for federal student loans and are made aware of their aid eligibility. This will be particularly important if Congress modifies and/or replaces the current federal loan/grant programs. Counseling should make students aware of their full eligibility for federal student aid and encourage them to exhaust these funds before turning to private student loans, which are riskier, more expensive, and contain few consumer protections. NACAC would also support provisions that allow professional development for those responsible for helping students and families navigate the financial aid process.

We strongly urge the Committee to preserve the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF). Some Members of Congress are calling for its elimination, in part because of the cost to taxpayers. PSLF is a direct legacy of the original intent of the HEA. Namely, that students not



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forgo a college education that could lead to valuable public service jobs, including education, public safety, and charitable work, because of the increasing prospect of student loan debt. Without PSLF, thousands of individuals may not consider or pursue careers at qualified non-profit organizations and/or federal, state, local, or tribal governments, crippling the important work of school counselors, teachers, police officers and scores of other critical occupations. Our members would be negatively affected by the elimination of this important program.

College Access and Success

NACAC also strongly supports the TRIO and GEAR UP programs. These programs help low-income students obtain the academic and college advising support needed to succeed in secondary school and enroll in postsecondary education. As you are aware, some form of postsecondary education is a prerequisite for economic success and mobility. Yet students from high-income families enroll in college at a rate approximately 30% greater than students from low-income families. And by age 24, 99% of students from the top income quartile who enrolled in college completed their bachelor's degree, while only 21% of students from the bottom income quartile did so. NACAC urges the Committee to continue its bipartisan support for TRIO and GEAR UP by increasing the programs' funding, which will allow more students to participate and benefit from them.

NACAC is also supportive of S. 2423, the Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act, introduced by Senator Brian Schatz (D-HI). The REAL Act would restore Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated individuals in order to cut the cycle of recidivism, save taxpayer money, and improve safety. NACAC urges the Committee to include this legislation in the reauthorization bill.

Accountability

NACAC also strongly supports provisions designed to protect students and taxpayers from unscrupulous colleges. In our [letter in response](#) to Chairman Alexander's white paper, we outline many of our concerns and support for particular provisions to help ensure that students attend colleges that are most likely to help them succeed and ensure taxpayers that their tax dollars are being used well. In short, NACAC supports strengthening many current protection measures, including the 90/10 rule, gainful employment, and cohort default rates, rather than weakening these regulations.



Undocumented Students

If Congress fails to act in the coming weeks, NACAC strongly urges the Committee to include provisions like the DREAM Act (S. 1615 & H.R. 3440) or similar legislation in the reauthorization that would provide stability for hundreds of thousands of students who were brought to the United States as children but now live under a threat of deportation because of President Trump's decision to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. A vast number of these students have thrived in our schools and significantly contributed to our communities and economy. Congress should pass legislation as soon as possible to help these students.

NACAC appreciates that the DREAM Act allows public institutions to charge in-state tuition to those that qualify under the DREAM Act and we would urge the Committee to support provisions in the reauthorization that allow these colleges to do the same for those that have been granted DACA or other legal status.

International

NACAC supports policies that strengthen international student mobility—foreign students' ability to study and work in the United States and American citizens' and permanent residents' pursuit of educational experiences abroad. International educational experiences help students develop a broader understanding of the world through meaningful interactions between and with students, academics, and communities. Positive experiences in another country and the development of intellectual and social relationships can position graduates as more engaged global citizens who can positively shape global outcomes.

Furthermore, NACAC strongly supports efforts to ensure that students, and those in the surrounding community, have a safe learning environment. However, NACAC believes that the policies in place to screen and vet foreign individuals seeking to study in the US prior to the 2017 travel bans were appropriate, making these bans unnecessary and harmful to America's image as a welcoming and highly regarded study destination. The direct and indirect effects have already been seen through international student enrollment declines in 2017, and it is anticipated that the declines may continue for several years to come. This is a major threat to the United States' economic prosperity, public diplomacy efforts and, from the Committee's perspective, academic and innovative excellence. It may also result in tuition increases, as many US institutions rely on foreign students who pay full tuition. During the 2016-2017 academic year the 1,078,822 international students studying at US colleges and universities contributed \$36.9



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billion and supported more than 450,000 jobs to the US economy. To the extent possible, HEA's reauthorization should help promote international study and cross-cultural opportunities.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on this important legislation. Please contact [Michael Rose](#), Director of Government Relations, with any questions regarding NACAC's public policy positions or advocacy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Hawkins", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Hawkins
Executive Director, Educational Content & Policy

CC: Members of the HELP Committee