

July 15, 2019

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

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

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chairman
House Committee on Education and Labor
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
House Committee on Education and Labor
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Scott, and Ranking Member Foxx:

We write as organizations dedicated to the advancement of education, science, public health, and the public good to express our support for federal investments in graduate and professional students. Graduate and professional education are vital elements of the nation's higher education and innovation ecosystems that empower U.S. economic competitiveness and contribute to our nation's health and security. As you continue the process of reauthorizing the Higher Education Act (HEA), we understand you will face difficult decisions regarding limited resources and many priorities. We urge you to ensure graduate education is a priority.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, entry-level jobs requiring an advanced degree are among the fastest growing occupationsⁱ. Furthermore, many positions that increasingly require advanced degrees for professional advancement, such as teachers, nurses, and social workers, are essential to society but not highly compensated. The national average starting salary for a teacher is just \$39,249ⁱⁱ. Federal aid is essential to ensure access, affordability, and ultimately graduation. Moreover, the notion that individuals can just pay "out of pocket" for graduate school is largely unfounded. Many programs require students to pursue their degree full-time.

Decisions made by Congress in the past relative to student loans have made graduate and professional education more expensive for students. For example, Congress eliminated the in-school interest subsidy for graduate students, made graduate students pay higher interest rates than undergraduates, and required that they pay higher origination fees on Federal Direct PLUS loans. Prior to the expiration of the Perkins Loan Program, Congress eliminated eligibility for graduate students. This trend is unacceptable and economically self-defeating for our nation as we look to globally compete with the most innovative and skilled workforce.

As part of HEA, we urge Congress to retain strong graduate student loan options, including the Grad PLUS program. We also support strengthening the programs that provide critical aid to students who are pursuing graduate education as well as programs that support expanding diversity, equity, and inclusiveness within graduate education.

We urge you prioritize graduate and professional education in an HEA reauthorization bill and are eager to work with you in furtherance of that goal. Such progress is an important factor for our organizations' ability to support a comprehensive HEA bill.

Sincerely,

AccessLex Institute
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Astronomical Society
American Council on Education
American Educational Research Association
American Geophysical Union
American Mathematical Society
American Medical Student Association
American Physical Society
American Student Dental Association
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of American Universities
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Association of Big Ten Students
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Coalition for the Life Sciences
College and University Professional Association for Human Resources
Council for Christian Colleges and Universities
Council for Opportunity in Education
Council of Graduate Schools
Council of Independent Colleges
EDUCAUSE
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Graduate-Professional Students
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
Student Veterans of America

CC:

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee members
House Education and Labor Committee members

ⁱ <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>

ⁱⁱ <http://neatoday.org/2019/04/29/national-average-teacher-salary/>