

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

September 30, 2019

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott  
Chairman  
Education & Labor Committee  
2176 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx  
Ranking Member  
Education & Labor Committee  
2101 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor & Pensions  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor & Pensions  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building

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

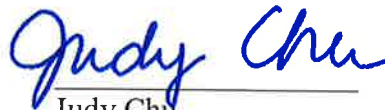
The Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), and Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), – collectively known as the Congressional Tri-Caucus – write to share our priorities as you consider the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA).

Higher education is fundamental to the success of our nation. These priorities are imperative to addressing the historical educational inequities within communities of color and historically disadvantaged communities. The reauthorization of HEA must ensure all students regardless of race, national origin, religion, immigration status, language ability gender, and disability have equitable access to a high-quality post-secondary education. We urge you to consider our Tri-Caucus priorities of the CHC, CAPAC and CBC as you proceed with HEA Reauthorization.

Sincerely,



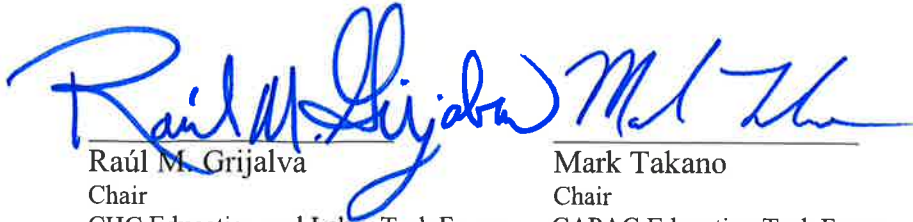
Joaquin Castro  
Chair  
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Judy Chu  
Chair  
Congressional Asian Pacific  
American Caucus



Karen Bass  
Chair  
Congressional Black Caucus



Raúl M. Grijalva  
Chair  
CHC Education and Labor Task Force

Mark Takano  
Chair  
CAPAC Education Task Force



Danny Davis  
Chair  
CBC Education and Labor  
Task Force

Frederica Wilson  
Chair  
CBC Education and Labor Task Force

Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Chair  
CBC Education and Labor Task Force

**TRI-CAUCUS PRIORITIES FOR THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE HIGHER  
EDUCATION ACT  
IN THE 116TH CONGRESS**

**I. IMPROVE COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY**

**Federal Pell Grants and Work Study**

- Increase the maximum award level of Pell Grants so they better align with the rising cost of higher education.
- Index Pell Grants to inflation.
- Revise the formula used to allocate work study funds based on student need and Pell Grant aid.
- Provide tuition-free and debt-free colleges and universities by investing in federal-state partnerships to make a four-year college degree possible to achieve without debt.
- Increase funding for Federal Work Study at institutions that enroll high levels of Pell Grant recipients.
- Improve access to work study opportunities aligned with academic study and career interests, including those in community service-learning programs for low-income students.
- Establish additional funding for students that complement Pell Grants. This funding would cover costs of living (food, housing, transportation, etc.) and non-tuition educational costs (books, fees, etc.).
- Restore Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated people.
- Extend Federal Financial aid eligibility to undocumented students and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients.
- Maintain year-round Pell Grant availability.
- Provide new Pell Grant eligibility for short term training programs offered at community colleges.
- Include language assistance for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and any other documents related to financial aid.
- Simplify FAFSA by allowing data from other federal agencies (such as IRS) to be used in the application to reduce the number of questions and in addition the following -
  - Deem students eligible for a zero expected family contribution (EFC) determination if the student or the student's parents are recipients of a means tested program.
  - Increase the income threshold to qualify for zero EFC to \$50,000.
  - Eliminate the Selective Service registration and prior drug conviction question from the student eligibility criteria for federal student aid.
  - Simplify the determination process for homeless and foster care youth.
- Improve information tools, financial literacy and require the Department of Education to partner with institutions to standardize financial aid award letters and terminology.
- Provide small-dollar emergency grants for students to help students continue their education rather than dropping out due to financial concerns.

## **Federal Student Loans**

- Reduce the student loan debt burden for borrower's past, present, and future.
- Protect the Grad Plus Loans and Parent Plus Loans programs.
- Protect the Income Based Repayment Program.
- Protect the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and the Temporary Expanded Public Service Loan Forgiveness (TEPSLF) programs. Ensure individual borrowers receive clear information about the status of their loans, correct loan repayment plans, and all qualifying PSLF payments. As well as require the ability to seamlessly enroll in PSLF and TEPSLF electronically.
- Improve student loan counseling to help students borrow wisely and manage debt repayment.
- Restructure the Federal Student Aid office to serve students better. Automate recertification of borrowers' incomes while they are enrolled in income-driven repayment plans using information on file at the Department of Treasury.
- Automate enrollment into income driven plans for borrowers who are severely delinquent on their loans.
- Automatic verification of totally and permanently disabled borrowers' continued eligibility for a loan discharge during the three-year monitoring period.
- Automatic enrollment of defaulted borrowers in an income-driven repayment plan upon completion of loan rehabilitation.
- Protect students from institutions that engage in predatory practices by codifying the borrowers defense to repayment rule.
- Protect students from low-quality programs by holding institutions accountable and codifying the gainful employment rule.
- Require post-secondary institutions to use language in financial aid offers that clearly indicate which components of the package are loans.

## **II. STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY OF HBCUS AND MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS**

- Authorize permanent mandatory funding for HCBUs and all MSIs as currently defined in HEA.
- Protect current investments and statutory programs and increase federal funding for MSIs and HBCUs.
- Provide increased and sustainable support and funding for the AANAPISI Program to help underserved students overcome barriers to a college degree, by increasing funding authorization for the AANAPISI Program to \$60 million.
- Establish a post-baccalaureate grant program for AANAPISIs that already exists for other MSIs.
- Provide robust and sustainable support and funding for the Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions Program by authorizing an increased level of funding.
- Increase Funding for teacher preparation programs at MSIs.

- Make permanent HSI STEM Articulation Program under Title III, Part F which is scheduled to expire at the end of Fiscal Year 2019.
- Increase Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Mathematics (STEAM) resources directed to communities of color.
- Ensure that HBCUs & MSIs have funding for students of color to enter technology fields that will better prepare them for the future of work.
- Update the Strengthening Institutions – Tribal College Program at the Department of Education (HEA Title III Part A &F)
- Ensure funding for the Tribal College & University and American Indian & Alaska Native Language Revitalization and Training Program.

### **III. IMPROVE EDUCATION QUALITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS**

- Encourage and expand access for low-income students to dual enrollment, early college, and similar programs in high schools.
- Promote improved coordination of community colleges and four-year institutions to ensure ability to transfer credits between institutions.
- Increased funds for K-12 and higher education mentorship programs.
- Consider developing an incentive program within Title IV to reward institutions that increase graduation rates of Pell students, ensuring no penalty to institutions that educate low-income students.
- Increase federal support for first year student retention and success programs.
- Increase college access and improve college completion for service members and veterans.
- Support workforce training programs including those offered at community colleges.
- Maintain provisions that prohibit institutions from engaging in agreements with financial institutions that predatorily market financial products to students.
- Develop accountability metrics that protect students from predatory for-profit educational institutions.
- Address the 90/10 loophole to protect Veterans from predatory for-profit educational institutions by moving the ratio to 85/15.
- Incentivize institutions to create support programs to ensure students graduate on time.
- Encourage institutions to establish an accessibility office to support mental health services for students.
- Allow students with disabilities to use their existing documentation of a disability (IEP, 504 plans) to access accommodations at institutions of higher education.
- Create a program modeled on the federally-funded DC Tuition Assistance Grant providing tuition assistance for graduates of Northern Marianas College and American Samoa Community College who want to pursue a four-year degree at any public university in other parts of the United States.
- Maintain integrity and accountability of gatekeeping system for Federal accreditation and State licensure policies.
- Increase funding for federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program to meet student-parents' need for affordable childcare.
- Authorize the creation of Native American language revitalization program that awards grants for Native American language programs appropriate for the population served at institutions

that serve American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians or Native American Pacific Islanders.

- Increase resources to Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) to increase graduation rates.
- Support a \$40 million competitive grant to provide funding for school districts across the country to support STEM education for girls, students of color, LGBTQ students, and students with disabilities.
- Improve civil rights enforcement to protect college students from harassment and discrimination: Any HEA reauthorization must strengthen protections from discrimination and harassment through additional reporting under the Clery Act and stronger enforcement penalties for colleges aiming to skirt reporting and accountability.
- Ensure university officials are held accountable for hate crimes and hate-based incidents that occur on their campuses by requiring accreditors to assess institutions of higher education campus safety programs during the accreditation process, including the annual dissemination of certain information to students and faculty.
- Protect students from incidents of hazing through educational programs and bolstering reporting requirements.
- Improve access to student voting on college campuses -
  - Define “good faith effort” to distribute voter registration forms in the Higher Education Act to mean sending correspondence at least twice a year and no less than 30 days before voter registration deadlines for federal and state elections, with links to voter registration information.
  - Designate a staff member or office as the “Campus Vote Coordinator” to answer student questions about voter registration.
  - Provide a right of action against those institutions that engage in patterns of violating this law.

#### **IV. PROMOTE COLLEGE READINESS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR, FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS AND DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS**

- Increase funding and strengthen GEAR-UP, TRIO, HEP-CAMP as needed and other federal funded college access programs to help minority students, low-income students, students who would be first-generation college students, and students who are English language learners access and complete college.
- Ensure that GEAR-UP, TRIO, HEP/CAMP and other federal funded college access programs are reaching schools predominantly attended by low-income students, minority students, students who would be first-generation college students, and students who are English language learners.
- Maintain GEAR-UP, TRIO, and HEP/CAMP as separate federal programs.
- Reform and streamline the Department of Education’s (ED) grants appeals process to ensure institutions of higher education and other qualified organizations with long-standing, high-quality programs can appeal ED’s decisions with technical assistance and a peer-review process to ensure a continuation of funds that service vulnerable student populations.
- Continue to provide information to low-income high school students through existing federal college access program on how to navigate the financial aid process and estimate actual cost of attendance.

- Continue to support programs that provide financial literacy and financial aid counseling to low-income, minority, first generation, and English Learner students.
- Establish funding that supports English Learner Educators.
- Promote applied experiences for students and support experiential learning.
- Require institutions to provide students with information about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to ensure students have the information they need to access benefits for which they may be eligible.

## **V. INCREASE THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF TEACHERS OF COLOR**

- Expand high-quality outreach and recruitment programs for minority teachers at both the undergraduate and graduate levels through financial assistance, including loan forgiveness, and technical support while improving and expanding retention efforts for educators of color.
- Increase support for teacher education and professional development, including special education, teacher quality grants, and teacher residence programs.
- Include language that prioritizes teacher preparation programs that recruit and retain students of color, and programs that recruit students to teach into high-need shortage fields such as English Learner or bilingual teachers.
- Establish grants to fund development of teacher preparation programs to train teachers on evidence-based English Learners instruction
- Require teacher preparation programs to report the pass rate and average score of students taking state teacher performance assessments, and the number of students in the program, by race, ethnicity, and gender.

## **VI. SUPPORT GRADUATE STUDENT ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, QUALITY, AND STUDENT SUCCESS**

- Support increased funding and strengthen graduate programs at HBCUs, MSIs and Tribal Colleges and Universities.
- Expand eligibility for the Subsidized Stafford Loan Program to students enrolled in graduate programs and allow Pell Grants to be used for graduate programs.
- Reauthorize and strengthen Title III and Title V HBCU and MSI graduate programs and the Patsy Mink Fellowship Program.

## **VII. SUPPORT ACCESS, PARTICIPATION, AND SUCCESS FOR UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH**

- Allow Dreamers, TPS recipients, otherwise undocumented students to apply for financial aid under FAFSA to protect them from loan servicer and fraud abuse.
- Permit Dreamers , TPS recipients, and otherwise undocumented students to be eligible for Pell Grants, federal student loans, work study and federally funded college access programs.
- Require post-secondary institutions to give in-state tuition to Dreamers, TPS recipients, and otherwise undocumented students who reside in the state of the institution.

- Allow Dreamers, TPS recipients, and otherwise undocumented students to participate in GEAR UP and TRIO programs.
- Strengthen grant programs that assist institutions of higher education (IHEs) in establishing or developing minority student support centers, specifically for undocumented students.

### **VIII. IMPROVING DATA SYSTEMS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION**

- Create a student level data network with all racial groups, racial subgroups, and ethnicities as recognized in the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey to ensure schools are being held accountable to relevant and useful measures.
- Increase data collection, while safeguarding student's personal information, of student transfers and graduation outcomes by the Department of Education to improve understanding of student completion rates.
- Disaggregate undergraduate, graduate, and professional school enrollment data by all racial groups, racial subgroups, and ethnicities as recognized in the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.
- Adjust the criteria of students tracked through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) so that it captures more community college students and includes part time students, non-first-time students, and students with an intent other than seeking a degree.