



October 28, 2019

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
HELP Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
HELP Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

On behalf of eleven undersigned members of the Today's Students Coalition—a diverse group of policy, advocacy and membership organizations who have joined forces to push for urgently needed policy changes that will better serve today's students—we appreciate your continued work on a bipartisan, comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). Today's students are more diverse in age, race, and income than any previous generation, and the Today's Students Coalition advocates for the following postsecondary policies that support students' success. We hope you will consider these recommendations as you continue your work to reauthorize the HEA.

Ensure the security of today's students' basic needs, health, and wellness: Paramount to student success is the assurance of individual basic needs. The Today's Students Coalition believes institutions should be incentivized and provided resources to address student food and housing insecurity, such as through existing funds like the Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant (SEOG) and the Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP). We appreciate that Chairman Alexander's Student Aid Improvement Act and Chairman Scott's College Affordability Act both include provisions to improve notification of and connection to federal means-tested programs, including SNAP, low-income housing assistance, and transportation resources.

We also support the creation and expansion of career pathway models that increase student access to crucial services such as skills instruction, career counseling, emergency funding, transportation, and child care. We applaud the inclusion of this priority in the College Affordability Act.

Expand supports for student parents and caretakers: Almost one-in-four students today is a parent, and many others are caretakers for other dependents, such as parents. The Today's Students Coalition believes we must continue to invest in programs like the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program and that we should create ways to incentivize partnerships between child care providers and colleges. We are encouraged to see the College Affordability Act's prioritization of CCAMPIS funding and increased quality standards, however, that should not be the only means to support today's students parents. We support and look forward to working with Congress on ways to expand child care partnerships, address the need for quality emergency child care options, and ensure critical programs, like work-based learning, provide access to child care.

Ensure undocumented students who immigrated as children can access and afford postsecondary education: Today's students who immigrated to the United States as children should be afforded access and resources to attend institutions of higher education by allowing them to be eligible for federal student aid. The Today's Students Coalition appreciates the provisions in the College Affordability Act that would extend aid to such students, and believes this is an important provision that could affect a portion of the students who may be eligible for DACA status. While ultimately DACA students need a more comprehensive law establishing and maintaining their status, we recognize that is outside of the committees' jurisdictions.

Provide robust supports and protections for military-connected students: Today's student veterans and military-connected students need vigorous fraud protections and borrower defense to repayment regulations to protect military-connected students in the event of fraud or a school closure. The Today's Students Coalition also believes we should close the 90-10 loophole to better protect military-connected students, and we are encouraged to see both of these provisions included in the College Affordability Act.

Incentivize evidence-driven strategies to increase completion for today's students: The Today's Students Coalition is pleased to see the prioritization of emergency aid in the College Affordability Act, as emergency aid is a proven strategy to help today's students complete their degree or credential. We are also pleased to see reference of evidence-based accelerated learning opportunities including dual enrollment and early college high schools. However, we think more can be included in the bill to further emphasize additional institutional and system-wide evidence-based reforms we know work in helping students access and complete postsecondary education.

Modernize the Pell Grant to better serve today's students: The Pell Grant continues to be the bedrock of financial aid and is critical for today's students. The Today's Students Coalition believes that the program can be strengthened by restoring the grant's purchasing power, indexing awards to increase alongside inflation, and expanding Pell grant eligibility to a broader universe of programs, including high-quality short term programs. We appreciate the commitment to the Pell Grant program in both the Student Aid Improvement Act and the College Affordability Act.

Update the federal student aid process to reflect the realities of today's students: The process of receiving federal student aid continues to be a barrier for too many of today's students, and the current formula does not adequately reflect the financial picture of many of today's students. The Today's Students Coalition supports simplifying both the FAFSA form and formula, especially for students receiving means-tested benefits, and accounting for students' full financial picture through allowing a negative expected family contribution. We appreciate that both the Student Aid Improvement Act and the College Affordability Act take steps to significantly simplify the student aid formula, however simplifying the form and formula is only a piece of the picture. Verification of student and family information too often is confusing, burdensome, and delays financial aid for today's students. We support changes to streamline this process in the Student Aid Improvement Act, and hope that verification is no longer a barrier to student aid for today's students.

Improve student loan borrowing and repayment to increase financial success: Today's students need robust and clear information about loan borrowing and repayment options before, during, and after enrollment. The income-driven repayment (IDR) process should be simplified and the income recertification process should be improved, and we are glad to see this priority included in the Student Aid Improvement Act and College Affordability Act. In addition, we must maintain our commitment to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program and make it more accessible for borrowers and simplify the program's complex procedural hurdles. We are encouraged to see such provisions in the College Affordability Act.

Update financial aid rules to better serve today's students: Student parents and caregivers would benefit greatly from an increased income protection allowance (IPA) in the financial aid formula, and we are thankful for the inclusion of this provision in both the Student Aid Improvement Act and the College Affordability Act. However, we believe there are two important additional reforms that are not included in either piece of legislation: resetting Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) and Pell Lifetime Eligibility Usage (LEU) rules for returning adult students.

Make campus-based aid work better for today's students: The Federal Work Study (FWS) formula should be reworked to prioritize schools with a higher proportion of low-income students, and we appreciate the reforms to the formula in the College Affordability Act. While that much needed adjustment will better target funds to institutions, more can be done to be sure that work-study opportunities further the education and career goals of today's students. We believe that on-campus employment, including FWS, should be better connected to careers.

Improve postsecondary accountability to protect students' financial security: We applaud the College Affordability Act for closing the 90-10 loophole to require institutions to include all military and veteran educational benefits in their calculation of federal funding they receive. We also appreciate the College Affordability Act's commitment to minimum standards for student outcomes for institutions to be eligible for federal student aid through a recommitment to rules

like Gainful Employment and Borrower Defense to Repayment. Protecting today's students in the event of school closures is a priority for the Today's Students Coalition, and we are encouraged to see in the College Affordability Act efforts to coordinate the Triad's communication and response to early warning signs of closure. Last, we are pleased to see the College Affordability Act maintain and strengthen states' roles in the higher education quality assurance Triad.

Improve postsecondary data systems and increase data transparency: The Today's Students Coalition is encouraged to see proposals to create a student-level data network included in the College Affordability Act, and to see Chairman Alexander co-sponsor separate legislation to create a student-level data network — we believe this provision is critical to an updated HEA that provides better information to today's students and their families.

Change financial aid rules to allow for multiple pathways to and through postsecondary education: Higher education is no longer a singular path for many of today's students, and recognition of learning outside of the traditional classroom setting has evolved to meet their needs. The Today's Students Coalition supports aligning student financial aid with high-quality models of learning, including competency-based education, work-based learning, and dual enrollment. We appreciate the competency-based education demonstration program and dual enrollment and early college programs included in the College Affordability Act.

Support educational institutions, employers, students, and other stakeholders working together to increase student access to and success in high-quality education and training: The Today's Students Coalition believes in investing in evidence-based industry partnerships that lead to success for today's students. We are encouraged to see a commitment to supporting institutions' implementation of evidence-based institutional reforms and innovative practices through the proposed Student Success Fund in the College Affordability Act.

In closing, we are appreciative of your continued commitment and efforts to reauthorize the Higher Education Act to update policies to better serve today's students. As the legislative process continues, the Today's Students Coalition can serve as a vital resource to solutions-driven, student-centered policy.

Sincerely,

Higher Learning Advocates
Jobs for the Future (JFF)
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in
Higher Education
National Campus Leadership Council
National College Access Network
National Skills Coalition
Student Veterans of America

UPCEA
Veterans Education Success
Young Invincibles
Excelencia in Education