



American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
AFT PSRP
AFT Higher Education
AFT Public Employees
AFT Healthcare

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July 31, 2008

United States Congress
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the more than 1.4 million members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), including 165,000 higher education professionals, I urge you to support the conference report on H.R. 4137, the College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2008.

The AFT applauds Chairmen Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) and George Miller (D-Calif.) as well as Ranking Members Michael Enzi (R-Wyo.) and Howard McKeon (R-Calif.) for their leadership in producing a bipartisan reauthorization bill. H.R. 4137 will make higher education more affordable and allow colleges, universities and faculty to continue to define and maintain the standards for student achievement.

Pell Grants, Loan Forgiveness and Student Persistence

We are particularly pleased with the continued commitment in H.R. 4137 to increasing student access and restoring the purchasing power of Pell Grants by proposing incremental growth over the next six years, ending with a maximum of \$8,000 for the 2014 academic year. H.R. 4137 also makes Pell Grants available yearlong, which will provide additional assistance to nontraditional and part-time students. The AFT supports the expansion of loan forgiveness under the Direct Loan Program for teachers, school counselors, librarians, early childhood educators, speech-language pathologists and audiologists, nurses, mental health professionals, and others serving the public interest.

In addition to student aid, the conference report recognizes the need for other efforts to help low-income and nontraditional students both to gain access to higher education and to stay in school. The AFT supports the new grants for access and persistence. We believe the combination of greater financial aid and more support services is crucial to assist financially and educationally at-risk college students succeed.

Enhancing Integrity in the Student Loan Program

In the wake of the recent private student loan scandals, we applaud the provisions in the conference report designed to provide students and their families with better information and protect them from harmful lending practices. The conference

report requires lenders to adopt a code of conduct and provide enhanced consumer disclosures with respect to private education loans. The report also expands oversight for regulatory agencies to issue regulations, implement new standards and provide programs to enhance financial literacy among students.

Accreditation

We also support the changes made to the accreditation process in the conference report, which affirm the role of accreditation in our higher education system and promote balance in the oversight of that process. The AFT believes these changes will help ensure that those responsible for educating our students have the primary role in setting the curriculum and defining the standards by which student achievement is measured.

Textbooks and Requirements for Disclosing Staffing Practices

In addition, we applaud the additional information that now will be provided to students and their families, in particular, details on the upfront costs of textbooks and the faculty who will be instructing their classes. H.R. 4137 mandates that institutions provide information on the numbers of part-time and full-time faculty teaching courses and each institution's faculty-to-student ratio. For the first time, institutions will have to provide information on the number of college courses being taught primarily by graduate teaching assistants.

Title II

Title II of the conference report offers an opportunity to improve teacher quality by providing resources to schools of education so they can refine current teacher preparation programs to ensure that prospective teaching candidates are properly trained for the classroom. Because Title II deals in part with compensation and staffing issues, we are pleased that the conference report acknowledges this and, where applicable, utilizes collective bargaining as the mechanism for implementation. We also welcome the conference report's focus on recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers by promoting better teacher preparation programs.

Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR)

The final conference report also includes language (Section 104—Protection of Student Speech and Association Rights) that was approved by the Senate when it passed S. 1642. This language is substantially improved from the harmful Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR) language passed by the House in the 109th Congress. That language would have promoted the concept that the federal government should take a role in curriculum, teaching and grading at our colleges and universities. While we maintain our objection to Section 104, we do appreciate that this new language recognizes the differing missions and roles of colleges and universities and reaffirms that the free exchange of ideas is fundamental to higher education.

College Cost Containment

The AFT believes that the rising cost of college requires attention; costs must be kept within the reach of low- and middle-income students. Many public institutions have been forced to raise tuition based on a dramatic decline in state support. For that reason, we support the State Higher Education Spending Chart. At the same time, we do not believe in imposing penalties on institutions that are sometimes forced to increase tuition in the face of inadequate public funding and rising technological and other costs. We appreciate the bill's effort to encourage institutions to monitor and manage their costs carefully, but we are concerned that its focus on identifying areas for cost reduction may have unintended consequences. For example, the provision could undermine the quality of education by giving institutions another reason to replace experienced and accomplished full-time tenured jobs by offering others lower salaries, substandard healthcare, and other reduced benefits.

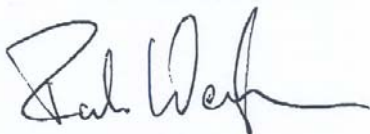
Preventing Fraud and Abuse

H.R. 4137 strengthens the quality standards for distance education and federal efforts to prevent, identify and prosecute diploma mills. However, changes to the current 90/10 provision in the conference report are of concern to the AFT and could potentially undermine these efforts to reduce fraud and abuse in the federal student aid program. Current law seeks to ensure that federal student aid is not the sole funding stream to for-profit schools by requiring that these institutions derive at least 10 percent of their revenues from non-HEA Title IV sources. The conference report provides for-profit institutions new flexibility in meeting the 90/10 rule and could inadvertently cause the same fraud and abuse the provision is trying to stop.

Notwithstanding our concerns related to several of the provisions highlighted above, the AFT believes this conference report represents a significant improvement to current law. To this end, I urge you to vote yes on final passage.

Thank you for considering the AFT's views on H.R. 4137.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randi Weingarten", written over a light blue rectangular background.

Randi Weingarten
President

RW: emc opeiu #2 afl-cio