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A Union of Professionals

American Federation of Teachers
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March 23, 2006

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the more than 4 million members of both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), including 300,000 higher education professionals, we write to express our views on H.R. 609, the College Access and Opportunity Act of 2005, scheduled for consideration on the House floor next week.

We recognize the progress made on this legislation during Committee consideration on several issues of importance to the AFT and the NEA. However, a number of outstanding issues of great interest to our members remain unresolved and prevent us from supporting H.R. 609 in its current form.

The AFT and the NEA believe that the current Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization represents a tremendous opportunity both to improve access to higher education for America's low- and middle-income students and to improve the quality of teacher education and preparation programs. However, in its current form, H.R. 609 is overly focused on improving access to federal aid for private entrepreneurs as well as imposing unnecessary federal restraints on college faculty in the classroom by adding provisions such as the Academic Bill of Rights.

Every HEA reauthorization since 1965 has focused on the expansion of college opportunity. Unfortunately, H.R. 609 in its current form does not carry forward this legacy because it fails to provide the necessary supports to enable students to enter and succeed in college. We respectfully request that you review our specific comments on H.R. 609, which are attached for your review.

We look forward to working with you on these issues of great importance to the AFT and NEA higher education professionals and the students they serve, and to improve the bill as it moves through the legislative process.

Please contact Gabriella Gomez of the AFT at (202)879-4452 or Nancy O'Brien of the NEA at (202)822-7371 if you should have any questions on our positions.

Sincerely,

Kristor Cowan
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