



American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
AFT PSRP
AFT Higher Education
AFT Public Employees
AFT Nurses and Health
Professionals

555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
202-879-4400
www.aft.org

Randi Weingarten
PRESIDENT

Lorretta Johnson
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Mary Cathryn Ricker
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

VICE PRESIDENTS

J. Philippe Abraham
Shelvy Y. Abrams
Mary J. Armstrong
Barbara Bowen
Christine Campbell
Zeph Capo
Alex Caputo-Pearl
Donald Carliso
Larry J. Carter Jr.
Kathy A. Chavez
Melissa Cropper
Evelyn DeJesus
Aida Diaz Rivera
Jolene T. DiBrango
Marietta A. English
Eric Feaver
Francis J. Flynn
David Gray
David Hecker
Jan Hochadel
Fredrick C. Ingram
Jerry T. Jordan
Ted Kirsch
Frederick E. Kowal
Karen GJ Lewis
Louis Malfaro
Joanne M. McCall
John McDonald
Martin Messner
Daniel J. Montgomery
Michael Mulgrew
Ruby J. Newbold
Candice Owley
Andrew Pallotta
Joshua Pechthalt
Paul Pecorale
David J. Quolke
Stephen Rooney
Denise Specht
Wayne Spence
Tim Stoelb
Ann Twomey
Adam Urbanski



December 12, 2017

U.S House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 1.7 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, I write in opposition to H.R. 4508, the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform Act. The PROSPER Act is anything but a bill that will help Americans prosper. Unfortunately, like the Republican tax bill, it severely curtails opportunities for working Americans, including those attending college. It stands in stark contradiction to the efforts of the Republican Party of Dwight Eisenhower and others, who opened up college opportunities to our young people and veterans; instead, the PROSPER Act continues the current Republican Party's pattern of waging war on hardworking Americans' attainment of knowledge, skill and opportunity.

By curtailing or eliminating programs that provide access to college, student loans, loan forgiveness and teacher preparation, the PROSPER Act would make college significantly less accessible and affordable. For example, the bill eliminates grant programs that help low-income students afford college, including the Pell Grant inflation "tie in." Without inflationary increases, Pell Grants will effectively decrease year after year, putting low-income students further behind at a time when the maximum Pell Grant of \$5,920 covers less than 30 percent of the average cost of college attendance. The bill also eliminates Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants—a program that provides more than \$730 million to low-income students. The combined effect is to make college less affordable and accessible to low-income students.

In addition, the PROSPER Act would eliminate Title II of the current law, which focuses on Teacher Quality Enhancement grants, Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education grants, and key loan forgiveness programs. At a time of ongoing teacher shortages and recruitment, diversity and retention challenges, the removal of federal funding for teacher preparation hinders the profession's ability to address these challenges—much less prepare the next generation of teachers. This refusal to invest in our future is tantamount to stripping money for medical education and for training for the armed services.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

The bill eliminates financial aid and penalizes students who do not remain on pace to complete an associate degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years—ignoring the needs of working adult students and those with family obligations.

The PROSPER Act also eliminates many of the repayment and loan forgiveness options that student borrowers have under current law, and that are currently used by poor, moderate or middle-class Americans engaged in public service or trying to balance their life and family obligations with paying their student loans. For instance, the bill now requires lower-income students to pay the interest on their loans while they are in school (which would increase a borrower's overall loan balance), and it provides low-income and distressed borrowers a new, less-supportive income-based repayment plan. The National Consumer Law Center estimates that under this plan, low-income borrowers with \$30,000 of debt would need 138 years to repay their student loans, further impairing mobility and exacerbating racial wealth gaps. In effect, this is like establishing a new set of debtor prisons for our future generations.

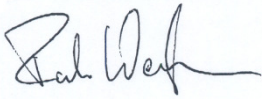
And perhaps this bill's cruelest and most cynical provision is ending the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. This program helps and encourages young people to devote their lives to public service—teaching, nursing and the like. It is an equalizer in an era of skyrocketing college costs and a tool to improve public services. It corrects for budget cuts, lagging salaries and underinvestment in the public service workforce; increases teacher diversity; and helps ensure well-qualified nurses stay in rural hospitals. The elimination of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program tells students not to go into public service. It is not only mean-spirited, it is bad for our nation and our economy.

And as tough as the PROSPER Act is on young people and on public service, it wholly embraces predatory and profit-making enterprises. The PROSPER Act repeals basic protections for borrowers, such as the 90/10 rule, which prohibits for-profit educational institutions from getting more than 90 percent of their revenue from federal financial aid. The bill also eliminates gainful employment and borrower defense regulations that protect students from institutions that exploit them for their financial aid, often leaving them with worse outcomes than before they enrolled, and with so much debt and such worthless degrees that they can't afford to repay their loans. It doesn't simply roll back the Obama-era protections for students, it tells them they take a back seat to the predatory and fleecing scams of for-profit colleges—scams that led to the protections in the first place.

Moreover, the bill allows short-term training programs—those providing as little as eight credit hours of instruction over 10 weeks' time—to be eligible for financial aid. The bill fails to require that these programs be connected with career pathways, meet completion or job placement standards, or provide the supports needed for student success. By eliminating these guardrails, this bill gives unscrupulous institutions a new avenue for recruiting students of color and low-income students, leaving them with worthless credentials and nondischargeable debt.

Simply put, the PROSPER Act is anything but an avenue to prosperity. If enacted as is, it will make it both harder and costlier for students to earn a high-quality degree. We urge you to reject this bill and start over with a bipartisan process. Absent a total restart, we urge you to support amendments to restore important programs that make higher education more affordable and accessible, such as grant-aid programs, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program, and support for teacher preparation programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randi Weingarten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Randi Weingarten
President

RW:emc opeiu#2 afl-cio