



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

December 11, 2017

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Brett Guthrie
Chairman
Subcommittee on Higher Education
and Workforce Development
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Susan Davis
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Higher Education
and Workforce Development
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

As the House Committee on Education and the Workforce considers H.R. 4508, the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act, Jobs for the Future (JFF) would like to offer the following recommendations on the bill.

First, we applaud the Committee for working to update the Higher Education Act. The current law is outdated and does not effectively address the needs of today's postsecondary students. JFF agrees that the law must be changed to help an increasingly diverse student population in the United States prepare for and succeed in today's economy. JFF urges the Committee to be bold in the development of innovative and evidence-based postsecondary strategies to help a broad range of individuals, including those who are unemployed and underprepared, successfully access, complete, and attain the postsecondary credentials and skills that are needed for family-supporting careers. However in all of these efforts, it will be vital to ensure that individuals who are most in need have access to the full range of services and supports that ensure economic mobility for all Americans.

The PROSPER Act recognizes that traditional models of postsecondary education do not well-serve the needs of an increasing number of students in today's economy. The PROSPER Act supports competency-based education and begins to move away from antiquated seat time requirements, a change that would benefit adult learners – a population that makes up roughly 40% of today's postsecondary population – who often need an accelerated route towards completion. The bill also expands access for federal financial aid to shorter-term credentials and partnerships between new providers of higher education and traditional colleges and universities. The bill authorizes new earn-and-learn career pathway partnerships between employers and institutions of higher education which will help ensure that students gain practical work experience. To further ensure that students gain relevant work experience, the bill reforms the Federal Work Study (FWS) program by increasing funding for the program, focusing on outcomes, and reducing constraints on student placements with extramural employers—changes that can help link FWS to meaningful work-based learning opportunities for more students. The PROSPER Act would also increase the HEA's focus on

improved student outcomes by establishing a College Dashboard to improve transparency about graduate outcomes, including earnings, and increasing the attention of the accreditation process on student outcomes. Finally, the bill makes shifts towards a focus on evidence-based policy in HEA, including through a new focus on evidence in the TRIO program, through new IMPACT grants designed to use evidence to improve college access and completion for underrepresented students.

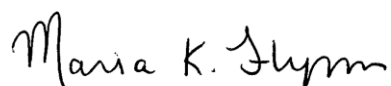
While we are pleased to see these shifts towards modernizing our higher education system, JFF also believes that Congress must continue to provide students with the supports and resources they need to succeed in higher education. We are concerned that the bill eliminates and makes reductions in a number of student financial supports – such as elimination of the Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant (SEOG), student loan interest subsidies, and public service loan forgiveness. These programs provide critical resources to support student success. While we understand and support the Chairs’ desire to make sense of a very complex web of student assistance programs, we are concerned that the bill as written could make college less affordable and limit access for low-income students.

As the Committee and Congress continue to consider reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), we urge that you reconsider the elimination of programs that are designed to assist low-income students pay for postsecondary education that otherwise may be out of their reach. We also encourage you to further strengthen the bill’s quality control and accreditation provisions, particularly as they pertain to the expansion of competency-based education and Title IV eligibility for short-term credentials and new providers of higher education. These are exciting new delivery mechanisms, but we must create outcomes-focused guardrails to ensure that these newly eligible programs are of high quality and protect students against bad actors. We also urge you to further expand the bill’s College Dashboard provisions by allowing for a secure, privacy-protected student-level data network to calculate currently unavailable metrics, such as post-college earnings for *all* students. An improved and robust data system will help ensure consumers have the information they need to make smart decisions and hold institutions accountable for outcomes. Finally, we ask that you consider doing more to support college completion and evidence-based policy in the HEA, establishing a state postsecondary completion grant program, through the leveraging of existing authorities, to support the scaling of evidence-based policies and practices at the state and institutional levels.

Additionally, JFF offers you our full set of higher education [recommendations](#) for consideration in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. We look forward to continuing to work with Congressional leaders from the House and Senate as the higher education reauthorization process proceeds and moves the nation’s higher education system towards helping more Americans attain the skills and credentials needed for today’s economy.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria K. Flynn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.