



May 16, 2017

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Support the Bonamici/Polis Amendment to Improve H.R. 2353, The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act

Dear Representative,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the National Women's Law Center, the American Association of University Women, the Center for Law and Social Policy, Association of University Centers on Disabilities, and The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, we are writing to express our concerns regarding the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for 21st Century Act (H.R. 2353) and support for the Bonamici/Polis Amendment to improve the underlying bill. Reauthorization of the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act should modernize and build on the nation's career and technical education programs and as such should preserve the secretarial authority needed to ensure programs are of high quality and effectively serve students, especially those facing the greatest barriers. **We urge the House Education and the Workforce Committee to support the Bonamici/Polis Amendment to improve the bill and make other changes to ensure that a reauthorized Perkins Act meets that standard.**

High-quality career and technical education can provide a critical option for students to achieve the skills and knowledge they need to pursue the careers of their dreams and compete in the 21st century economy. The amendment offered by Representatives Bonamici and Polis helps to ensure that the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act preserves a crucial tool needed to make the law's requirements meaningful. Too often girls, women, students of color, and students with disabilities find their futures and possibilities limited by tracking into low-quality "votech" programs that reinforce gender stereotypes, hold students to low expectations, and fail to prepare students for success in postsecondary education and high-wage careers. The federal investment in career and technical education should focus on opening doors to high-quality preparation that expands opportunity and provides access to high-skilled, high-wage work for all students'—especially those who have historically been denied such opportunities. May 17 is the 63rd anniversary of the Supreme Court's momentous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. It would be shortsighted to roll back the important role the Department of Education holds in making that landmark decision meaningful and in expanding opportunity in education.

Under current law, states failing to meet at least 90 percent of their targeted performance levels are required to implement program improvement plans—and those plans must give

“special consideration to performance gaps” for the “special populations” defined in the law¹ and other marginalized groups. Federal agencies negotiate goals with states and hold them accountable for meeting these goals with sanctions, to ensure that federal investment is used to support student outcomes.

In contrast, H.R. 2353 requires states to set their own equity goals without any input from or negotiation with the U.S. Department of Education and takes away explicit authority to enforce the requirements under the law through the use of sanctions. These provisions undermine the Secretary’s historical role in ensuring equity and opportunity in educational programs. Although greater state level engagement in the development of state plans is a worthwhile goal, it should go hand-in-hand with the Secretary’s explicit authority to intervene throughout the process if targets are insufficiently ambitious or are not being met. The Bonamici/Polis amendment restores provisions to ensure that states are adhering to career and technical education (CTE) systems that will lead to student success. However, the bill must also preserve the Secretary’s ability to negotiate with states and ensure CTE programs expand equity and opportunity for special populations.

We recognize that much has gone into this long-overdue reauthorization and that important changes have been made in response to lessons learned about program coordination and alignment, especially with the Workforce Innovation and Improvement Act and the Higher Education Act. However, the bill in its current form is a flawed compromise in need of improvement. Without robust program accountability for both students’ opportunities and outcomes, the changes to the Perkins program will have limited effect.

We urge you to support the Bonamici/Polis amendment and other program accountability measures so that the changes made to the Perkins Act are meaningful and are implemented and enforced by the Department of Education. Please do not hesitate to contact Liz King, Leadership Conference Director of Education Policy at king@civilrights.org or (202)466-0087 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
National Women’s Law Center
American Association of University Women
Center for Law and Social Policy
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates

¹ Defined in current law as individuals with disabilities; individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including foster children; individuals preparing for nontraditional training and employment; single parents, including single pregnant women; displaced homemakers; and individuals with other barriers to educational achievement, including individuals with limited English proficiency.