



Chairwoman Virginia Foxx  
House Education and the Workforce Committee  
2176 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

December 11, 2017

Dear Chairwoman Foxx:

On behalf of Rebuilding America's Middle Class (RAMC), a coalition of community colleges, I am writing to express RAMC's views on the PROSPER Act. We appreciate the Committee's efforts to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA) to modernize the postsecondary education system and better reflect the needs of today's students and workforce.

RAMC is a coalition of State and individual community college systems from across the country, representing over 130 colleges and 1.5 million students. RAMC's mission is to build a stronger, more competitive workforce, and therefore, a strong middle class by increasing access to and success in higher education. While we believe that the PROSPER Act contains a number of provisions that would improve our ability to provide a high-quality, low-cost education that prepares students to achieve their life and career goals, we are also concerned with certain provisions and need to examine others to determine their real-world impacts on our students and colleges.

RAMC is pleased that the PROSPER Act would expand access to higher education for many adult and working students and help them to cost-effectively fund their education. The bill would allow students to use Pell Grants for shorter-term programs, which would provide students with more opportunities to pursue a high-quality, industry-led postsecondary education that is tailored to their career path and helps them to obtain high-wage employment more quickly. In addition, the bill would improve the Federal Work-Study program by updating it to better target high-need areas, focus on undergraduate students and foster greater Work-Study opportunities with businesses.

Moreover, we are pleased that the legislation would help institutions of higher education (IHEs) ensure that students enter the workforce with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. The bill would:

- Create a new program and support partnerships between IHEs and businesses to expand access to apprenticeships and earn-and-learn programs. We appreciate the Committee's recognition of the importance and need for a well-educated and highly skilled workforce.
- Provide institutions with the flexibility to better support competency-based education, which would create additional postsecondary education opportunities that allow students to learn at their own pace and are more tailored to students' career plans and goals.
- Allow financial aid administrators to assign lower borrowing limits for students if applied across the board. This would provide administrators with the discretion they need to help students borrow responsibly.

However, RAMC also believes that certain provisions require further analysis to determine their impacts on students and IHEs. First, RAMC appreciates the Committee's move toward program-focused loan repayment rates, rather than cohort-focused default rates. While such a move could provide students with the additional information necessary to more fully understand their ability to repay their loans after graduation, we believe this policy needs to be closely reviewed to determine its potential impacts on our students, programs and institutions. Second, RAMC appreciates the Committee's efforts to address issues related to



returning Title IV funds. RAMC believes that the Committee's approach could promote persistence and decrease the amount of time it takes students to complete a program, but this provision requires further examination to determine the potential impacts on our schools and the students we serve.

In addition to reviewing the impacts of certain provisions, RAMC will continue to work to improve several other provisions of the bill that are likely to have an adverse impact on many of our students, such as the elimination of undergraduate subsidized loans and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. Also, while we appreciate the Committee's efforts to improve the HEA's data collection and transparency provisions and provide more information to students and the public, we believe there is more work to be done to provide even more comprehensive and useful information to students, families, institutions and the public.

RAMC is grateful for this opportunity to comment on the PROSPER Act and express our views on the various provisions affecting our students and institutions. RAMC urges the Committee to work in a bipartisan manner to comprehensively reauthorize the HEA to better meet the needs of today's students and workforce. RAMC stands ready to work with you and provide assistance as Congress works to address these critical issues. Thank you for your leadership on behalf of our nation's college students and for considering our views on this important topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Joe D. May'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joe May,  
President, RAMC  
Chancellor, Dallas County Community College District

Cc: Robert C. "Bobby" Scott, Ranking Member