

**Remarks of Ranking Member Bobby Scott
Markup of Higher Education Package
2175 Rayburn Office Building
June 22, 2016; 10:00 – 11:30 am**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased we are marking up this package of bipartisan bills that seek to make discrete amendments to the Higher Education Act. The legislative package before the committee today will:

- expand access to dual or concurrent enrollment programs at Hispanic-Serving Institutions; and

- strengthen Historically Black Colleges and Universities—recognizing the important role these institutions play in helping many first-generation students earn a college degree.

- simplify the financial aid application process; and

- help students make well-informed decisions when selecting a college and determining how to finance their education.

Taken together, this package represents a step in the right direction for students and families.

H.R. 5529 makes amendments to the Title V program to support dual enrollment programs allowing more students to accumulate college credits at HSIs and attain postsecondary degrees.

H.R. 5530 will make much needed improvements to the HBCU Capital Financing Program and help more institutions take advantage of the program's affordable financing opportunities.

HR 5528 makes permanent an executive action taken last year by President Obama that allows income from the previous year's tax return to be used to complete the FAFSA. Under this bill, students and parents will be able to apply for financial aid when filling out college applications and will no longer have to worry that they have not filed the current year's tax returns in order to complete the FAFSA form. Prior to this change, some families could not fill out the FAFSA on time which delayed the receipt of critical financial aid for students.

Another important provision of this bill will require the Secretary to periodically report to Congress on the needs of limited English proficient students. To make sure a college education is within reach for **all** students, the Department should make the FAFSA more accessible to students and families with limited English proficiency. I am pleased that we could come together in a bipartisan fashion to make these important changes.

H.R. 3179 will make sure students receive better counseling on financial aid and student debt and help students make informed choices about how to finance college and how much they will owe. And, lastly, HR 3178 will improve data transparency around key metrics—including outcomes for non-traditional students and Pell Grant recipients— and will provide students and their families with better, more accessible information when selecting a college.

While these bills represent a step in the right direction, Congress **must** keep its eye on the real prize—a full-scale reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that prioritizes college access, affordability, and completion.

Today, more than ever, a college education is **a need** rather than **a want** for most Americans. By the year 2020, 65 percent of all jobs will require some form of postsecondary education. In fact, over the course of a lifetime, the average worker with a bachelor's degree will earn approximately \$1 million more than a worker without a postsecondary education.

Committee Democrats believe that each and every student should have access to a higher education that provides the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in the 21st century economy without having to take on decades' worth of student debt. Pell Grants—the foundation of federal financial aid for low-income students—are critical to this effort. As we reauthorize HEA, Congress should prioritize making sure the Pell Grant covers a greater share of college costs for more students.

If Congress is serious about making college more affordable for low-income students, previously appropriated balances in the Pell Grant program must be protected and stay with Pell recipients. Unfortunately, the Senate Committee on Appropriations recently passed a Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations bill that seeks to cut \$1.2 billion from Pell, balancing other funding needs on the backs of low-income college students. This is unacceptable. Cuts to Pell Grant funding will make it considerably harder to strengthen the program through reauthorization.

Instead, Appropriations Committees have an opportunity to strengthen Pell this year by increasing the maximum award set in appropriations from \$4,860 to \$5,000. This increase, when paired with supplemental funding in statute, would raise the maximum Pell Grant to an estimated \$6,055—putting critical new dollars in students' pockets.

Mr. Chairman, I once again thank you for the bipartisan process that allowed us to work on this package of bills, but I also urge my colleagues to quickly and urgently turn to the important work of full-scale reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. Millions of students are counting on us to make sure they have a fair shot at competing in our 21st century economy.

I am committed to working with my colleagues here in Congress to make sure the promise of access to high quality, affordable higher education opportunities is not

lost. While today's committee proceedings represent a step in the right direction, I look forward to tackling comprehensive reauthorization in the months to come.

Thank you and I yield back.