



January 25, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Minority Whip
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman
Committee on Education and the Workforce

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce

Dear Speaker Ryan, Minority Leader Pelosi, Majority Leader McCarthy, Minority Whip Hoyer, Chairwoman Foxx, and Ranking Member Scott,

As president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), I write to raise very serious concerns regarding the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Higher Education Reform (PROSPER) Act, H.R.4508, which was introduced and passed by the House Committee on Education and the Workforce in less than two weeks. If the bill is brought to the House Floor without significant changes, APLU would oppose the legislation as it would sharply increase the costs of higher education for students and make students and taxpayers more vulnerable to predatory actors and poor-performing institutions and programs. We respectfully direct your attention to [our analysis](#) that details top concerns with the bill along with a [summary](#).

APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public research universities. Our membership includes 196 U.S. member campuses which collectively enroll 4 million undergraduates and 1.2 million graduate students, award 1.1 million degrees, employ 1.1 million faculty and staff, and conduct \$40.8 billion in university-based research.

The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act is a long overdue opportunity to increase access, affordability, and completion for students while advancing the short and long-term prosperity of our nation. The context for this reauthorization is critical as policymakers will likely shape federal higher education policy for the next generation of students.

A college education has never been more important and more valuable to our country, individuals, and society at large. It has been well documented that bachelor's degree holders experience significantly greater employment opportunities and much higher earnings potential and, in turn, contribute far more in taxes over their lifetime than those whose highest completed level of education is high school. But the benefits extend well beyond a paycheck. A bachelor's degree recipient is much more likely to report being in very good or excellent health, nearly four times less likely to be a smoker, and nearly five times less likely to be imprisoned—each of which limit potential strain on public resources while increasing a citizen's ability to

benefit their society. Overall, college graduates' reliance on government programs is estimated to be 39 percent less than those with only a high school diploma. College graduates are also more engaged citizens – voting and being politically active at much higher rates, volunteering in their community more often, and more significantly contributing to charitable causes.

According to the College Board, for the 2017-18 academic year, full-time, in-state students at public four-year institutions paid an average of \$4,140 in net tuition and fees with living expenses averaging another \$10,800. And while much attention is often paid to the college graduate burdened with six figures worth of student debt, only 0.5 percent of public university students complete their undergraduate degrees with that much debt. Among the 59 percent of public university undergraduates who borrow, the average student debt balance at graduation was \$27,000 in 2015-16. The average cumulative debt across all graduates from public four-year institutions, including non-borrowers, was \$15,800.

This is not to say there are not challenges associated with affordability and increasing levels of student debt. Sharp declines in state support per student are the driving force behind tuition increases at public universities. State disinvestment from public higher education has significantly shifted the cost burden off state ledgers and onto the shoulders of students and their families. In fiscal year 2016, 46 states are spending less per student than before the recession. While some states have begun to restore funding, average state spending remains 18 percent lower than before the 2008 recession. The Great Recession sharpened the rate of disinvestment but the shift from state funding to student/family funding unfortunately goes back much farther. In 1988, 48 states contributed more per-student to public higher education than students paid in tuition. The relationship has now flipped in many states. In 2015, students paid a higher amount in tuition than state per-student funding in 22 states, with six states requiring students to shoulder the costs by a ratio of 2-to-1. This trend is simply unsustainable if the United States is to remain the global innovation leader.

A comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act requires very careful analysis. APLU expects that as we continue to review the legislation, we will update our analysis to which we link above.

As we continue to review the bill, it is clear the measure is presently highly problematic and would ultimately make college less accessible and affordable. Additionally, it would make students more vulnerable to schools and programs that would not serve their best interests. The legislation adopts many of the recommendations of the Taskforce on Federal Regulation of Higher Education, but then adds new highly problematic regulatory burdens. While there are provisions APLU supports, cumulatively, the legislation would be an alarming setback from present law.

We urge a significant restructuring of the bill before it goes to the House Floor and welcome the opportunity to work with you.

Sincerely,



Peter McPherson
CC: Members of the 115th Congress
Chairman Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member Patty Murray