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Technical Feedback: Amend ESRA by adding the CTA bill text as an additional section to Title II, Part C (ESRA, P.L. 107-279)

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the discussion draft of the Advancing Research in Education Act (AREA). We appreciate the HELP committee soliciting and considering comments provided during the Request for Information on the reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act. As the Committee moves forward, we urge the amendment of ESRA by adding the College Transparency Act (CTA) bill text as introduced, S. 1349, as an additional section to Title II, Part C (ESRA, P.L. 107-279). CTA would provide critical data necessary to meeting key goals the committee laid out during its RFI process.

As examples, two of the guiding questions during the RFI process were: how could the Institute for Education Sciences improve postsecondary data alignment, review of evidence-based practices and reforms, and utility of research reports and products to provide more transparency around student outcomes related to postsecondary access and completion? And, what interventions would support addressing disparities of such outcomes? We will only know the answers to these questions through CTA given the incomplete data reporting we have of students in postsecondary education.

CTA allows for the creation of a secure, privacy-protected Student-Level Data Network (SLDN) that would provide much better information about college access, success, costs, and outcomes. These critical data improvements would help students and families, policymakers, institutions, and employers make clear and informed choices and better understand the value and outcomes of our higher education system. Absent this infrastructure to provide these data, students and families are unable to make fully informed decisions about where to attend, and policymakers and institutions cannot craft evidence-based policies that help students succeed.

CTA would allow for much better reporting on student outcomes—from enrollment, completion, and post-college success across colleges and programs—in a transparent and consumer-friendly way. It would ensure that all students are counted. For example, current federal graduation rates only count students who are enrolled in school for the first-time and who attend as full-time students. In addition, the earnings information the Education Department has only counts students who receive Title IV federal financial aid, leaving out roughly a third of students in postsecondary education.

Including CTA in ESRA is common sense. ESRA has been successful in improving the quality of education research since its inception. And CTA is the most important way to ensure that IES is able to improve its mission further. CTA is bipartisan, bicameral and supported by nearly 160 organizations. In the 117th Congress, it passed the U.S. House of Representatives as an amendment to the America COMPETES Act of 2022 (H.R. 4521).¹

¹ Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2022, February). IHEP Celebrates House Passage of College Transparency Act in the America COMPETES Act. <https://www.ihep.org/press/americancompetes-act/>