



February 23, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

As a global leader in engineering and engineering technology education, the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). ASEE is dedicated to advancing engineering education and research, and the only society representing the country's 400 schools and colleges of engineering. Membership includes over 12,000 individuals hailing from all disciplines of engineering and engineering technology and including engineering educators, researchers, and students as well as industry and government representatives. These members share a common commitment to advancing innovation, excellence, and access at all levels of education for the engineering profession. Our schools and colleges of engineering and engineering technology are training the next generation of innovators that will design and build modern technology and systems to enhance our lives and health, grow our economy, protect our national security, and improve our country and world.

Federal Student Aid and Affordability

ASEE recognizes, along with the rest of the higher education community, that student financial aid is too complicated. Simplification of aid programs, however, should not lead to reduction of benefits to students. It is important that student aid options, particularly for graduate students, are maintained. Engineering education provides a proven pathway to the middle class and it is critical that this pathway continue to be accessible to students in need. To ensure affordability, we ask the HEA reauthorization legislation:

- Reinstating the annual indexing of the Pell Grant to no less than inflation to prevent any erosion of this critical benefit for low-income students.
- Supporting an additional Pell bonus or "super Pell" to incentivize students to enroll in more credit hours and more quickly toward completion.
- Maintaining the Federal Supplemental educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), which provides institutional flexibility to increase aid to the most needy students.
- Maintaining the in-school interest subsidy for undergraduate students, an important benefit for our most needy students that if eliminated will incur a significant debt burden on students.
- Eliminating loan origination fees, which currently only serve to increase student debt.
- Increasing annual and aggregate borrowing limits for federal undergraduate loans, which should be updated to reflect realistic levels.
- Simplifying repayment programs but maintaining important benefits such as public service loan forgiveness that offers engineering students the opportunity to choose to work in lower-paying fields addressing critical underserved needs or contributing to national security through federal service.
- Allowing unsubsidized loan borrowing for graduate students up to the cost of attendance to avoid moving students into the private loan market. If caps are reduced, those graduate, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, who cannot qualify for a private loan may not be able to

attend school at all. Engineering graduate students have very low default rates and should not be targeted for more restrictive borrowing.

- Maintain access of graduate students to Federal Work Study (FWS) funds.

Promote Innovative Post-Secondary Programs and Practices

ASEE supports efforts to reduce burdensome regulations on institutions of higher education and encourage innovative postsecondary education practices to ensure our education system is nimble and able to continually evolve to meet student and employer needs. At the same time, accountability provisions are important to protect students and federal tax dollars. Several provisions would promote this critical balance:

- Include the College Transparency Act to ensure transparency around institutional and program outcomes so students can make informed decisions.
- Maintain Title VI programs that support the development of our nation's deep expertise in world regions, global issues, international business, and foreign languages. As a global enterprise, these issues are critical to high quality engineering and engineering technology education as well as our ability to compete in global markets and to promote our national security.
- Address the recommendations included in the "Task Force on Federal Regulation of Higher Education" report. These efforts to streamline and reduce the regulatory burden on institutions of higher education will allow for more resources to be devoted to students and less to paperwork and compliance.
- Maintain accountability provisions such as those related to gainful employment and the 90/10 rule.
- Expand the Federal Work Study Program to allow eligible students to earn their FWS allocation for work done as part of a full-time co-op at a private employer. Many engineering schools utilize co-op to enable students to gain career skills and this change would enable alignment of FWS with these programs.
- Maintain Title II-Teacher Quality Enhancement and include engineering as an eligible discipline to enable better partnerships and more access to K-12 engineering education. The lack of teacher training focused on STEM, and engineering in particular, is an important issue facing K-12 education and the Department of Education has a key role to play through Title II programs.
- Create a pathway for Title IV funding for competency-based education programs while ensuring accountability to protect students and federal tax dollars.

Postsecondary education plays a leading role in the preparation of the engineering and engineering technology workforce, a driving force behind innovation and our economic development. ASEE is committed to advancing the development of innovative approaches and solutions to engineering and engineering technology education. We look forward to working with the committee to ensure that postsecondary education in our country is a driving force in its growth, success, and prosperity.

Sincerely,



Dr. Beville Watford, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
ASEE President