



The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chair
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and
Pensions (HELP) Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and
Pensions (HELP) Committee
628 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

The National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS) has reviewed S.2557, the Student Aid Improvement Act that Senator Alexander introduced last week. Proposed as a partially comprehensive education bill that includes HR 2486, the FUTURE Act, it also includes several items taken from other legislation, notably granting Pell for incarcerated students and for students in short-term career education programs.

NAGPS applauds efforts to pass bipartisan comprehensive education legislation, but we are concerned about the exact pieces that are being included in this proposal. For example, it limits the extension of Pell for incarcerated students only to those who are eligible for parole, not to all students, a limitation that had not been in the original bill (Restoring Education And Learning Act of 2019 [S.1074/H.R.2168]). Also, it extends Pell funding for those in short-term programs, but it includes for-profit institutions. These institutions had been explicitly denied funding in the original bill because they are notorious for being exceptionally harmful to students as evidenced by the numerous lawsuits the Department of Education is currently facing (JOBS Act of 2019 [S.839/H.R.3497]). Essentially, the bill removes the bipartisan elements from these important bills and then ties minority-serving institution (MSI) funding to their passage.

We understand Senator Alexander's desire to pass a comprehensive bipartisan higher-education bill instead of individual pieces of legislation. However, this bill is not bipartisan; it uses MSIs as a bargaining chip to advance partisan legislation.

Important to this proposal is that the authorization of these MSI's to receive funds expired on October 1st, funds that they receive the year *after* they have been authorized. While it may be possible to claim that these institutions have "already received" their funding for this year, this is technically true of *last year's* funds which they just received. If this is not resolved, then these institutions will not receive their funding at this time next year.

This is an important distinction: Institutions, administrators, faculty, staff - and most importantly - students all begin making decisions about the next year *now*. Administrators make hiring, financial aid, programmatic, acceptance, and scholarship decisions, and students apply for financial aid, for graduation, for graduate programs, and more. These institutions rely on these funds to continue to provide consistent, exceptional programming. **At this point, the future for over 6 million students hang in the balance - around 4 million of which are students of color who are underrepresented in higher education.**

These institutions are some of the best academic institutions in the country. They provide an enriching educational environment for many who would otherwise be isolated, unsupported, and disenfranchised at other institutions. Historically-black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have created more than 80% of all black

American physicians and dentists and are the leaders in STEM degrees for black students. Three out of four of all black people with a doctorate degree, four out of five of black federal judges, and half of all black faculty at traditionally white research institutions all earned at least one degree at an HBCU. **It is vital that we continue to support these institutions - and do so without tying their funding to other partisan positions - so that they can continue to support their communities.**

The National Association of Graduate-Professional Students cannot support the Student Aid Improvement Act. **We strongly encourage you to support the FUTURE Act in the form it passed the House, and to do so immediately.** Every day that passes is a day that these institutions - and these students - will go without support, knowing that their futures are being held hostage in order to pass legislation that is not only partisan, but is also harmful to students.

In the meantime, we encourage you to continue your efforts to pass a fully comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that prioritizes the needs of all students. In particular, we encourage you to include elements important to the success of graduate and professional students. These include extending Pell access to low-income graduate students who have unused Pell dollars (Expanding Access to Graduate Education Act of 2019, HR.3334) as well as the College Transparency Act (S.800/HR.1766), with the provision that graduate student-specific concerns be explicitly addressed and included. We would be happy to work with your offices on these elements.

We look forward to reviewing your ultimate proposal.

Sincerely,



Kaylynne M. Glover
Director of Legislative Affairs
National Association of Graduate-Professional Students
legislative@nagps.org

Cc:

Senator Mike Enzi
Senator Richard Burr
Senator Johnny Isakson
Senator Rand Paul
Senator Susan Collins
Senator Bill Cassidy
Senator Pat Roberts
Senator Lisa Murkowski
Senator Tim Scott
Senator Mitt Romney
Senator Mike Braun
Senator Bernie Sanders

Senator Bob Casey Jr.
Senator Tammy Baldwin
Senator Chris Murphy
Senator Elizabeth Warren
Senator Tim Kaine
Senator Maggie Hassan
Senator Tina Smith
Senator Doug Jones
Senator Jacky Rosen