

ASSOCIATION of JESUIT COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

AJCU

October 28, 2019

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XAVIER UNIVERSITY, OH

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan A. Davis
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Higher Education
and Workforce Investment
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lloyd K. Smucker
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Higher Education
and Workforce Investment
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Committee on Education and Labor Leadership:

The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), representing twenty-seven institutions in the United States and affiliated with over 100 worldwide, is pleased to offer comments to the House Education and Labor Committee on H.R. 4674, the College Affordability Act. We share our perspective on this reauthorization legislation with the goal of ensuring that a Jesuit education remains a viable and valuable option for students, and that our graduates continue to do good for society as compassionate and committed leaders in service to others.

Since their founding in 1540, members of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) have believed that providing access to education for underserved populations is central to their mission. Therefore, investing in financial aid for the neediest of students continues to be one of our Association's highest priorities. AJCU represents fifteen doctoral universities, ten master's colleges and universities, and two baccalaureate colleges in eighteen states and the District of Columbia. Our campuses enroll approximately 216,000 students and 9 in 10 students receive government or institutional grant aid to support their studies. On our campuses, nearly a quarter of our students are Pell Grant recipients (23%) and our Jesuit institutions boast higher than national-average 4- and 6-year graduation rates.

AJCU offers the following comments on behalf of our institutions, and in affiliation with the specific recommendations offered by fellow higher education associations on whose letters we have joined.

AJCU Supports Increased Investments in Student Financial Aid:

Education and outreach to the marginalized are integral to the Jesuit mission; thus we applaud H.R. 4674 for the commitment that the bill makes to increasing federal student financial aid. To that end, we appreciate the Committee increasing support for the Pell Grant Program and Campus-Based Aid Programs (Federal Work Study



[FWS] Program, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants [FSEOG] and Perkins Loans).

Reauthorization changes that will make a significant, positive impact on students' access to post-secondary education (including Jesuit schools) are: increasing the Pell maximum award and indexing future awards to the Consumer Price Index (CPI); authorizing a Federal Pell bonus program (though we would recommend making the bonus available to all schools whose Pell students graduate on time); expanding Pell eligibility to 7 years; allowing unused Pell grants for graduate study; and creating new emergency FSEOG grants. AJCU strongly supports these provisions.

AJCU is particularly grateful that the Committee seeks to restore the Federal Direct Perkins Loan program. On our campuses, Perkins Loans have offered vital support to students with the most significant financial need. This, coupled with institutional administration, allows the program to address the unique needs of individual students.

Perkins, FSEOG and FWS, in combination with Pell Grants, are the cornerstones of access to higher education and the timely completion of degrees. These programs have served the interest of students successfully for decades and assist those who would otherwise face significant hurdles in accessing and paying for college. They are essential to making college accessible and affordable and are worthy of increased federal support.

Changes to the campus-based formula will impact all 27 of our member institutions, and AJCU has questions about the formula included in H.R. 4674. AJCU would like to work with the Committee to ensure that the Campus-Based Aid Programs continue to support students with financial need, who count on those resources to help them thrive at our institutions.

We also applaud the Committee for extending Pell eligibility to vulnerable populations. AJCU is a supporter of H.R. 2168, the Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act, and appreciates the Committee's work toward reinstating Pell eligibility for incarcerated individuals. In addition, we support the extension of Title IV aid to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and Dreamer students. We would like to continue working with the Committee to develop policies that support these learners and ensure their success in and completion of post-secondary study.

AJCU Supports Making Loans and Loan Repayment More Affordable:

More reasonable federal loan terms and conditions are key to making the promise of benefits from education a reality. AJCU appreciates the changes included in H.R. 4674 that make federal student loans more affordable, including eliminating the origination fee; maintaining the in-school interest subsidy for low-income undergraduate students; maintaining current borrowing limits; preserving the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF); and tackling implementation and servicing issues with PSLF so that it can live up to its promise of promoting public service as a benefit to the nation.

AJCU Urges the Committee to Ensure that America's College Promise Extends to All Students:

AJCU urges the Committee to focus on the needs of low-income students, by giving them options for



study that best meet their educational needs and goals. Additional resources provided by the federal government should continue to support the students, especially those with demonstrated financial need.

Our member institutions are proud of their work in student formation, student success, student engagement and achieving 4- and 6-year graduation rates that are well above the national average. These strong outcomes are in part the result of robust student support programs, and deep engagement across our campus communities. The reauthorization should support students who seek this pathway to success through education.

Rather than direct federal funds solely to community colleges and risk undermining collaborative state partnership efforts, AJCU recommends strengthening federal state partnerships that provide resources to all students with financial need within the state. Many states continue to recognize and respect the value in providing direct student support. AJCU would like to work with the Committee to consider models that leverage federal resources, encourage partnerships with states, and support students directly at eligible nonprofit institutions. This, we would argue, is a winning vision for America's college promise.

Our institutions remain committed to academic excellence, service, leadership and caring for the whole person. Equally as important to this shared mission is the diversity of our community, and we welcome the opportunity to share those unique institutional perspectives with the Committee as you continue your important work on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. If you have any questions, please contact our Director of Government Relations, Jenny Smulson at Jsmulson@ajcunet.edu

Sincerely,

Rev. Michael Sheeran, S.J.
President
AJCU