



The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chair
House Education and the Workforce
Committee
2462 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
House Education and the Workforce
Committee
2328 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

January 31, 2024

Dear Chairman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott,

With the recent introduction of the College Cost Reduction Act (CCRA), the member organizations of the Federation of Associations of Schools of the Health Professions (FASHP) respectfully request that the Committee fully consider higher education policies that support and strengthen health professions education and the future health care workforce as continued efforts are made to reauthorize the Higher Education Act.

FASHP was created in 1968 as a forum for representatives of health professions education institutions to address education's role in organizational patterns of health care; to encourage effective collaboration among the professions in education and practice; to prepare health professions education for the future; and to serve as a liaison with other organizations sharing an interest in health professions education. FASHP comprises 19 associations representing a health professions education community that includes 7,429 programs, institutions, hospitals, and health systems, and more than 1.3 million students, faculty, clinicians, administrators, residents, and researchers.

Although we appreciate the Committee's efforts to make much needed changes to federal higher education programs and support certain provisions in the CCRA that would make student loans more affordable, FASHP has deep concerns with several proposed changes the bill would make. For example, the proposed elimination of the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) and the PLUS loans program would harm low-income health profession students, making it harder for them to earn their degrees and ensure the public receives the highest level of care from highly qualified professionals.

The elimination of the Grad PLUS program is particularly concerning, given that graduate degrees are often a requirement for licensure in many health fields. Rather than lowering the cost of attendance, this will likely push borrowers back into the private student loan market, where borrowing conditions are less favorable, and where students will lose access to critical federal protections and federal repayment and forgiveness programs, such as Public Service Loan Forgiveness, which is an important recruitment tool for many healthcare professionals. Limiting access to federal student loans would create further obstacles to students, institutions, programs, and the healthcare workforce. This is especially concerning as healthcare workforce shortages, including among physicians, nurses, and mental and behavioral health

care providers, have impacted virtually every community across the nation, including in rural communities.

It is in the best interest of the public for the federal government to support the education and training of future healthcare providers. Therefore, to enhance access to higher education, we support an expansion of the Pell Grant program currently part of the CCRA and urge the Committee to include an expansion of Pell for graduate study. As more Pell Grant recipients are entering graduate school, while remaining income-eligible to receive Pell and having not fully exhausted their full Pell eligibility, allowing them to continue using Pell towards a graduate degree would help encourage more low-income students to attend graduate school.

While FASHP believes that there are common sense approaches to decreasing the reliance on student loans, placing arbitrary aggregate limits on the amount students can borrow without any corresponding changes to increase financial assistance through grant aid is misguided. Doing so will harm students and the workforce, particularly for our health professions students who may need higher aggregate limits for the cost of their education.

As an association representing the health professions education community, FASHP understands that institutions need to be held accountable to their students. However, current provisions in the legislation on institutional accountability and risk-sharing payments that rely solely on post-completion earnings may not provide a holistic picture of an institution's performance. A balanced approach is needed that considers numerous factors contributing to educational quality and student outcomes.

While we have strong reservations regarding the aforementioned provisions in the CCRA, we do support a number of the proposed changes, several of which have bipartisan support. These include the elimination of interest capitalization and origination fees and streamlining of income-driven repayment, which would effectively abolish negative amortization and end the arbitrary distinctions between repayment of undergraduate and graduate loans. FASHP also supports efforts to equip borrowers with more information, allowing them to make informed decisions about how they finance their education.

As you consider the CCRA, we encourage you to retain vital federal student loan programs, maximize Pell, allow Pell to be used for graduate education, and reject arbitrary aggregate limits that don't accurately reflect the needs of our health professions students. We urge the committee to consider amending the CCRA, as the bill comes up for a markup this week and work in a bipartisan fashion to reauthorize the Higher Education Act so all students, including our future health professionals are supported in their educational pursuits. We stand ready and willing to work with you to develop bipartisan solutions that will improve the health and well-being of all our communities.

Sincerely,

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine

American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Council of Academic Physical Therapy
American Dental Education Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychological Association
American Physical Therapy Association
Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Chiropractic Colleges
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Association of University Programs in Health Administration
Council on Social Work Education
Physician Assistant Education Association