

February 6, 2008

The Honorable George Miller  
Chairman, Education and Labor Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20015

Dear Chairman Miller:

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) applauds your leadership to improve post-secondary education for students with disabilities through the College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2007 (H.R. 4137).

AUCD strongly supports the provisions within the bill that will expand opportunities for students with disabilities and improve the quality of postsecondary education for these students. Students with disabilities face multiple attitudinal, environmental, financial, and support barriers in accessing postsecondary education. Students with disabilities are less likely to participate in postsecondary education and when they do retention rates are low due many factors, including lack of supports and accommodations. The national gap in employment rates between individuals with and without disabilities is a staggering 37% and research supports that postsecondary education is a pathway to greater employment opportunities.

Overall, only 12% of individuals with disabilities report having graduated from college, compared with 27% of individuals without disabilities. Moreover, until very recently postsecondary opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities did not exist at all. AUCD applauds the Committee for including new model demonstration programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities that include for the first time access to financial aid. This is an exciting new frontier for individuals with intellectual disabilities, their families, and institutions of higher education.

We are also very pleased that language was included to establish a national technical assistance center and a study to assist institutions of higher education break down barriers to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. The provisions on postsecondary education for students with disabilities in the bill are a major step forward. The AUCD network of university centers stands ready to assist in the implementation of the Act and to help open the doors of post secondary education and the opportunities that go with it.

We would like to raise your attention to an amendment filed by Representative Kevin McCarty (Amendment #42). AUCD does not support this amendment. We feel that this would limit competition among eligible entities for the coordinating center.

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AUCD would like to see the Secretary have a wide range of applicants to from which to choose for the cooperative agreement. We encourage you to not support the amendment.

We look forward to working with you on reauthorization of the Higher Education Act this session of Congress and towards broad systems change at the national level to improve opportunities for full participation of students with disabilities in postsecondary education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "George Jesien".

George Jesien, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Association of University Centers on Disabilities