

Support the Higher Education Opportunity Act (H.R. 4137) Conference Report



July 30, 2008

Dear Representative:

On behalf of more than 100,000 bipartisan members of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), we **urge you to support the Higher Education Opportunity Act (H.R. 4137) conference report.** AAUW believes that the conference report maintains important programs for college students and provides some new opportunities to help all students, particularly women.

In this competitive global economy, *all* Americans should be afforded greater opportunities to attend and finish college, whether they attend school full-time or part-time. It is estimated that by 2014, there will be 4 million new jobs that will most likely require postsecondary education.¹ As skill requirements continue to increase, so too should access to postsecondary education for all students. AAUW applauds the Senate and House for having already passed the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (H.R. 2669) and is pleased that the conference report includes the following important provisions, which we enthusiastically support.

Nontraditional College Students:

AAUW is pleased that the conference report takes steps to address the needs of the growing number of nontraditional students, many of whom are female.² These women are more likely to attend school part-time due to work and family care responsibilities and may face extra expenses such as childcare. There are very few federal programs that recognize the unique needs of nontraditional students and provide appropriate assistance to them, so AAUW is pleased that the conference report has incorporated provisions that will assist these students as they struggle to make their college dreams a reality.

Year-round Pell Grants: AAUW is pleased that the conference report allows students to qualify for Pell grants based on a year-round enrollment schedule. Many nontraditional female students attend classes during the summers, and federal Pell grants should be available to all students willing to make a commitment to higher education, even if they have to chip away at that dream one class at a time.³

Childcare Funding (CCAMPIS program): AAUW supports the legislation's intent to increase the minimum CCAMPIS grant that institutions can receive and to expand the type of institutions that are eligible to receive these grants.

Increasing Opportunities for Women in STEM Fields:

AAUW is pleased that the conference report includes provisions to increase women's representation in STEM fields. AAUW supports programs that will bolster students' interest in STEM fields and improve teacher training and recruiting for these fields. AAUW supports the legislative provision that intends to fund a campaign to expand the population of qualified individuals in STEM fields, specifically analyzing factors that limit the participation of women and minorities.

Diversifying the Professoriate: Patsy Mink Graduate Fellowship Program:

AAUW is delighted that the conference report includes the Patsy Mink Graduate Fellowship Program, which would authorize fellowships for students obtaining a doctorate, or other terminal degree, with a specified teaching requirement after graduation. Named in honor of former Congresswoman Patsy Mink (D-HI), a primary force behind Title IX and an AAUW member, the

fellowships address concerns that, although women make up 39 percent of full-time collegiate faculty, they tend to hold less-senior instructional positions or work at two-year institutions, not research universities.⁴

Hate Crimes on Campus:

As a result of the 1998 Higher Education Act, colleges must report any crimes involving bodily injury in which the victim was targeted because of his or her race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or disability. However, there are limitations to the data gathered under HEA, which likely result from discrepancies between the FBI and HEA hate crimes definitions. AAUW is pleased that the conference report aligns the HEA hate crimes categories with the ones used by the FBI, which includes offenses such as arson, larceny/theft, intimidation, and destruction/damage/vandalism.⁵

Make College More Affordable:

AAUW also supports provisions in the conference report that address the private student loan scandals that have been brought to light, encourage colleges to rein in price increases, provide students and their parents with helpful college cost information, and streamline the federal student aid application process.

AAUW believes that the conference report takes important steps in modernizing the Higher Education Act to reflect the changing demographics and needs of today's college students. We **urge you to support the Higher Education Opportunity Act (H.R. 4137) Conference Report**. Votes associated with these issues may be included in AAUW's Congressional Voting Record for the 110th Congress. If you have further questions, please contact me at 202/785-7720 or Tracy Sherman, government relations manager, at 202/785-7730.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz
Director, Public Policy and Government Relations

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Occupational Projections and Training Data, 2006-07 Edition*. Retrieved February 4, 2008, from <http://www.bls.gov/emp/optd/optd001.pdf>.

² There are numerous definitions for "nontraditional students:" those who are over 25, work full-time, are pregnant or parenting, are displaced homemakers, or attend school part-time. This letter distinguishes between "nontraditional students" and students seeking nontraditional education and career paths – though many students fall into both categories.

³ Most students attend less than half-time temporarily, and aid to those students may increase their ability to complete a degree program. *Initiative to Aid Illinois Adult Learners*. Springfield, IL: Illinois Student Aid Commission, 2001.

⁴ West, Martha S. and John W. Curtis. *AAUP Faculty Gender Equity Indicators 2006*. American Association of University Professors. Retrieved February 4, 2008, from <http://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/63396944-44BE-4ABA-9815-5792D93856F1/0/AAUPGenderEquityIndicators2006.pdf>.

⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Hate Crime Statistics 2005: Universal Crime Reporting*. Retrieved February 4, 2008, from <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2005/methodology.htm>.