

# **The Higher Education Opportunity Act**

## *Expanding College Access, Strengthening our Future*

A college education continues to be the best path to the middle class. But more and more, high college prices and other obstacles are putting a college degree further out of reach for America's students. In addition to rising tuition, students and their families face an overly complex federal student aid application process and a student loan industry mired in conflicts of interest and corrupt lending practices.

The Higher Education Opportunity Act will continue this Congress' effort to make college more affordable and accessible. This bill would reform our higher education system so that it operates in the best interests of students and families, while boosting our competitiveness and strengthening our future. The legislation would:

### **Encourage colleges to rein in price increases and provide consumers with helpful information**

- ✓ Creates a user-friendly website to provide students and families with helpful information, such as tuition prices, graduation rates, and popular majors, when making important education decisions.
- ✓ Establishes web-based calculators that would provide students and families with early estimates of their expected college costs, and allow them to estimate the annual and total cost of a college education based on individual colleges and universities.
- ✓ Holds colleges and universities accountable for their tuition hikes by requiring them to report their reasons for tuition increases.
- ✓ Ensures states maintain higher education funding and encourages colleges to use innovative methods to keep costs down.

### **Restore integrity and accountability to the student loan programs**

- ✓ Requires institutions and lenders to adopt strict codes of conduct.
- ✓ Provides students with fair and full information about their borrowing options when taking out and repaying student loans, including the terms and conditions of both federal and private student loans; and promotes financial literacy and education for students and parents.
- ✓ Protects students from aggressive marketing practices by lenders.

### **Simplify the federal student aid application process**

- ✓ Streamlines the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process, and creates an easy-to-navigate two-page FAFSA-EZ form for low-income families.
- ✓ Provides families with extra time to plan for their college expenses.
- ✓ Encourages the Department of Education to coordinate with the Internal Revenue Service to use financial information that the government already has.

### **Make textbook costs more manageable**

- ✓ Provides students with advance information on textbook pricing to help them plan for expenses before each semester.
- ✓ Ensures that colleges and faculty have full textbook pricing information when making purchasing decisions.
- ✓ Requires publishers to provide pricing information on "unbundled" versions of every "bundled" textbook they sell.

## **Expand college access and support for low-income and minority students**

- ✓ Makes college more affordable for low-income and non-traditional students by allowing students to receive Pell Grant scholarship aid year round.
- ✓ Expands funding for graduate student programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Predominately Black Institutions.
- ✓ Strengthens the TRIO and GEAR UP college readiness and support programs for low-income and first-generation students.

## **Increase college aid and support for veterans and military families**

- ✓ Creates a new scholarship program for active duty military personnel and family members, including children and spouses of active duty military service members or veterans.
- ✓ Establishes support centers to help veterans succeed in college and graduate.
- ✓ Ensures fairness in student aid and housing aid for veterans to make it easier for them to go to college while also fulfilling their military service duties.

## **Ensure equal college opportunities for students with disabilities**

- ✓ Establishes a national center to provide support services and best practices for colleges, students with disabilities, and their families.
- ✓ Helps colleges recruit, retain, and graduate students with disabilities and improves education materials and facilities.
- ✓ Expands eligibility for Pell Grant scholarships and other need-based aid for students with intellectual disabilities.

## **Boost campus safety and disaster readiness plans**

- ✓ Helps all colleges develop and implement state-of-the-art emergency systems and campus safety plans, and requires the Department of Education to develop and maintain a disaster plan in preparation for emergencies.
- ✓ Establishes a disaster relief loan program to help schools recover and rebuild in the event of a disaster.

## **Encourage colleges to adopt sustainable and energy-efficient practices**

- ✓ Creates a grant program to help colleges and universities design and implement sustainable practices.
- ✓ Convenes the first-ever higher education summit on sustainability to examine how to implement energy-efficient and sustainable practices at institutions of higher education.

## **Strengthen our workforce and our competitiveness**

- ✓ Creates programs to bolster students' interest in science, technology and critical foreign languages through collaborations with businesses and other stakeholders.
- ✓ Improves teacher training and development programs and focuses on recruiting teachers into high demand science and technology fields.
- ✓ Encourages students to enter vital public service jobs by authorizing up to \$10,000 in loan forgiveness for public defenders, prosecutors, firefighters, military service members, first responders, law enforcement officers, educators, nurses, and others serving the public interest.