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CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

February 6, 2008

The Honorable George Miller, Chairman
Education and Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard P. "Buck" McKeon, Ranking Member
Education and Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller and Ranking Member McKeon,

The Center for Law and Social Policy is writing to express its strong support for H.R. 4137, the College Opportunity and Affordability Act, and the supporting manager's amendment. This bill will build on and strengthen efforts to ensure more low and moderate-income Americans receive the education, skills, and supports they need to access postsecondary education and training and gain the credentials needed for family-supporting jobs.

In particular, we commend the Education and Labor committee for addressing the following issues in H.R. 4137:

- Increasing the federal commitment to student persistence and completion by piloting a program to attach a Student Success Grant to every Pell Grant, to ensure that students receive the services they need to stay in college;
- Making college more affordable for low-income and nontraditional students by allowing eligible students to receive the Pell Grant year-around;
- Creating a Business Workforce Partnerships initiative that funds partnerships of colleges and employers to link credit-bearing college programs to business workforce needs and develop career and educational pathways;
- Providing Bridges from Jobs to Careers grants to colleges to increase lower-skilled workers' access to and completion of occupational credentials, through bridge programs and other innovations in remediation (or developmental) education;
- Simplifying the financial aid application process and making it more responsive to those in modular and compressed programs of study;
- Ensuring workers who have been laid off receive the financial aid to which they are entitled; and

- Expanding access to postsecondary education for those in corrections institutions thereby helping reduce recidivism rates.

We look forward to working with you during conference to ensure these items remain in the Higher Education Act reauthorization bill. In addition, we hope you will support two changes which the Senate is addressing in reauthorization:

- Allowing those individuals who lack high school credentials to prove their readiness for college and qualify for federal financial aid by successfully completing six credits in lieu of taking an “ability to benefit” test; and
- Making a technical correction to the independent student definition change enacted in the College Cost Reduction and Access Act to clarify that the definition covers youth who age out of foster care and youth who are adopted or move into the legal care of a guardian from foster care after reaching age 13.

Thank you for your efforts to expand access to and promote success for low-income and nontraditional students in postsecondary education.

Sincerely,

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Julie Strawn
Senior Fellow