



NATIONAL DOWN SYNDROME CONGRESS  
NATIONAL DOWN SYNDROME SOCIETY

February 6, 2007

Honorable George Miller, Chairman  
Committee on Education and Labor  
US House of Representatives  
2205 Rayburn House Office Bldg  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Howard McKeon, Ranking Member  
Committee on Education and Labor  
US House of Representatives  
2351 Rayburn House Office Bldg  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Miller and Ranking Member McKeon:

On behalf of the National Down Syndrome Society and the National Down Syndrome Congress, and the 350,000 individuals with Down syndrome and their families that we represent, we thank you for your continued leadership in the area of inclusive and accessible education for students with intellectual disabilities.

NDSS and NDSC are extremely pleased to give their complete support to H.R. 4137, as reported by the House Education and Labor Committee, along with the manager's amendment that includes enhancements to the legislation. As you know, H.R. 4137 will extend the authorization of programs under the Higher Education Act of 1965, and for other purposes. We join you in urging all members of Congress to give their wholehearted support to this important legislation. The provisions in H.R. 4137 will create a new reality and a far brighter future for students with intellectual disabilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When enacted, H.R. 4137 will allow students with intellectual disabilities who are attending programs designed for them in higher education to be eligible for the first time for Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and the Federal Work-Study Program. Allowing institutions of higher education to assist students with intellectual disabilities through the provision of work study funds and other forms of aid will help make it possible for these students to achieve previously unattainable higher education goals and will lead to gainful employment.

H.R. 4137 will also authorize the development and expansion of high-quality, inclusive model comprehensive transition and post-secondary programs to meet the rising interest and demand for this type of educational experience among students with intellectual disabilities and their families. Post-secondary programs on college and university campuses exist in approximately half of the states in the United States. Given the tremendous interest on the part of more and more students with intellectual disabilities and their parents, this provision of H.R. 4137 is especially significant and will have far reaching ramifications in expanding, strengthening and maintaining a network of post-secondary programs.

In addition, H.R. 4137 will authorize the establishment of a coordinating center for technical assistance, evaluation, and development of accreditation standards. This center will address accreditation criteria, standards and procedures for such programs, analyze possible funding streams for such programs and develop model memoranda of agreement between institutions of higher education and agencies providing funding for such programs. The work of this center is essential to institutions of higher education which offer post-secondary programs, and to those that anticipate creating such programs in the future.

Recent research focused on post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities reveals promising outcomes and results for these students. One study of 40 students with intellectual disabilities, 20 of whom had participated in post-secondary education and 20 of whom had not, showed that the students who had a post-secondary experience had obtained more competitive employment and had more earned income. Another study of 13 programs revealed that 65% of students who had participated in post-secondary program left the program with a paid job.

Unfortunately, students with intellectual disabilities are not eligible for financial aid because they do not receive a diploma, a GED or pass an ability to benefit test. Nor is it possible for their parents to utilize 529 savings plans to accumulate funds for tuition and other education-related expenses. Therefore, families must bear the costs of post-secondary programs by themselves. This factor limits the participation of students with intellectual disabilities in post-secondary programs because parents do not have adequate resources and even those who have resources must be concerned with providing long-term care and supports for the student with a disability. H.R. 4137 will make it possible for many more students with intellectual disabilities who do not have the economic means to benefit from a post-secondary education experience through access to Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and the Federal Work-Study Program.

On behalf of individuals with Down syndrome and their families, we applaud your leadership in this historic movement to open the doors to higher education to individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Sincerely,

Madeleine Will  
Director, National Policy Center  
National Down Syndrome Society

Susan Goodman  
Director of Governmental Affairs  
National Down Syndrome Congress