



July 29, 2008

The Honorable Edward Kennedy, Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Enzi, Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable George Miller, Chairman
2818 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard “Buck” McKeon,
Ranking Member
2818 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kennedy, Ranking Member Enzi, Chairman Miller, and Ranking Member McKeon:

I write to express my strong support for the Higher Education Amendments and College Opportunity Act of 2008. As an advocate for low-income, first-generation, and disabled students, I am very excited about the many provisions of this legislation that seek to enhance programs and services for such students and provide them with greater opportunities to pursue higher education.

I am particularly pleased with Section 403 of the bill, which contains several provisions that will benefit the many deserving students who participate in TRIO programs across the country. First and foremost, the legislation completely eliminates the Upward Bound Absolute Priority, which limited participation for non-failing 9th graders and all 11th graders, while subjecting recruited students to an unethical evaluation methodology. By prohibiting this dangerous initiative, the Members of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee in the Senate and the Education and Labor Committee in the House have preserved opportunities for the many students who have a strong desire and need to participate in the Upward Bound program. I also commend you for providing sufficient guidance to the Department of Education to protect all TRIO students during future evaluations of the programs’ effectiveness.

Another important innovation is the creation of an appeals process. As growing concerns have mounted in recent years over erroneous scoring in the TRIO grant process, the Members have acted to create greater transparency in this process and to provide redress for improperly rejected applicants. Such a mechanism will surely benefit TRIO students who would have wrongly been denied the opportunity to participate due to improper scoring. Indeed, the Higher Education Amendments and College Opportunity Act greatly expands opportunities for potential TRIO students by broadening program eligibility criteria to

include homeless and foster youth, students enrolled at branch campuses, older veterans, and federal reservists who were called to duty in the wake of September 11.

While TRIO is but a small part of this expansive bill, the benefits of these legislative changes will have a tremendous impact. Therefore, on behalf of the thousands of low-income, first-generation students across the country, I express my ardent support and sincere congratulations to you, the other Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and House Education and Labor Committees, and their staff for crafting this fine piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Arnold L. Mitchem".

Arnold L. Mitchem
President