



June 14, 2007

Chairman Edward Kennedy  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions  
644 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Michael Enzi  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions  
835 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman George Miller  
Committee on Education and Labor  
2181 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Howard McKeon  
Committee on the Education and Labor  
2101 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Kennedy and Miller and Ranking Members Enzi and McKeon,

We are writing on behalf of the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education (NCWGE), a nonprofit coalition of more than 50 organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities for women and girls. We respectfully submit the following comments as you work towards reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

NCWGE believes ensuring and increasing access to higher education is imperative to helping women obtain financial security and economic independence. NCWGE places particular importance on access to higher education for nontraditional students, ensuring students can stay in school to complete a degree, increasing financial aid, and improving opportunities for women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields. We remain committed to eradicating barriers to equal educational opportunity for women. As a result, this letter focuses on provisions that NCWGE urges Congress to include in its reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

***Increase Support for the Pell Grant***

The purchasing power of the Pell grant has declined substantially. Today, the maximum Pell grant covers only 33 percent of the total cost at a public 4-year institution, versus 55 percent of those costs 20 years ago.<sup>i</sup> This is particularly disturbing given that the Pell grant program was designed to aid low-income students and their families achieve their college dreams. In 2004-2005, a third of all Pell grant recipients classified as independent (for tax purposes), made less than \$10,000 per year, and over 60 percent had incomes below \$20,000.<sup>ii</sup> To update the Pell grant program, NCWGE supports increasing the maximum award level to \$5,100 and advocates mandatory appropriations to provide the increased resources for the program. In addition, NCWGE supports allowing students to qualify for Pell grants based on a year-round enrollment schedule. Many nontraditional students attend classes during the summers, and Pell grants should be available to these students.

***Expand SMART Grant Eligibility***

Current regulations for the SMART grant do not reflect the needs of nontraditional students, the majority of whom are women. As the regulations stand today, the SMART grant program denies help to students

who are part-time, often as a result of work or family responsibilities they must fulfill while they pursue higher education. Therefore, NCWGE believes part-time students who are otherwise eligible should be able to receive SMART grants. In addition, students who receive SMART grants, and are Pell grant eligible, should be able to receive both SMART grants and Pell grants.

### ***Create the Patsy Mink Graduate Fellowship Program***

Minorities comprise less than 20 percent of all collegiate faculty.<sup>iii</sup> Although women make up 39 percent of full-time collegiate faculty, they tend to be concentrated in less-senior instructional positions and at two-year institutions, as opposed to research universities.<sup>iv</sup> NCWGE recommends a new program be established under HEA. This program would authorize fellowships for doctoral and terminal master's degree study for students interested in obtaining a doctorate, or other terminal degree, with a specified service requirement to teach at degree-granting institutions of higher education after graduation. Appropriately named in honor of former Congresswoman Patsy Mink (D-HI), a primary force behind the passage of Title IX, the fellowships would be targeted at minorities and women to help diversify the higher education professoriate. As it is becoming increasingly difficult for students from underrepresented communities to pursue graduate degrees, we urge Congress to maintain the requirement for institutions to make this a priority.

### ***Increase Support for the Childcare Access Means Parents In School (CCAMPIS) Program***

NCWGE supports expanding access to support services that help women balance the demands of work, family, and education. Parenting students face serious problems securing convenient and affordable childcare, which often becomes a barrier to higher education. Providing quality, campus-based childcare will allow thousands of women to pursue a postsecondary education and succeed in that endeavor. Studies show that student parents with children have higher grade point averages, graduate in fewer years, and demonstrate greater persistence when their children are cared for in campus-based child care centers.<sup>v</sup>

The CCAMPIS program provides funds to schools for campus-based child care and after-school programming, primarily to serve the needs of low-income students. NCWGE believes campus childcare programs should be a top priority for higher education funding; unfortunately, appropriations for this program have dropped in recent years. The program was authorized at \$45 million, though funding has never matched that level. The President's FY 08 budget requested level funding for this program at \$15.8 million, far below what is needed to adequately serve eligible student parents. NCWGE also believes HEA should provide incentives for schools to operate CCAMPIS programs at night and on weekends, when many nontraditional and parenting students take classes.

### ***Make Student Loans More Manageable***

Loan repayment is an even more significant burden for women, who earn less on average over the course of their lives than their male counterparts. According to research, in 2004, college-educated women 25 and older earned 75 percent of what their male peers earned.<sup>vi</sup> This pay gap appears within the first year after college—even when women are working full-time in the same fields as men—and widens in the first ten years in the workforce. Since women are more likely to borrow than men and they will make less on average after graduation, female graduates are more likely to struggle with their loan debt.<sup>vii</sup>

There are several steps Congress can take to make loan repayment more manageable for students. First, give students the option of having their federal student loan payments capped at 15 percent of their monthly discretionary income, and forgive student loans after 25 years. Also, provide loan forgiveness for public sector employees after 10 years. Lastly, NCWGE also supports increasing the allowable college tuition tax deduction from \$4,000 to \$12,000, and converting the existing student loan tax deduction into a tax credit.<sup>viii</sup> Therefore, NCWGE supports passage of the Student Debt Relief Act (S. 359) as a stand

alone piece of legislation or incorporating this legislation into the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

No student wants to borrow more than is necessary to finance higher education, but when students need to borrow they should have access to loans that carry the most favorable terms and conditions. This means that some students need additional access to federal student loans, especially Subsidized Stafford Loans and Perkins Loans to avoid higher-rate, private bank loans. The President has called for the elimination of the federal Perkins Loan program, which requires institutional matching funds and services low-income students. This program offered aid to approximately 673,000 students in 2004.<sup>ix</sup> NCWGE believes the Perkins Loan program is a crucial part of the total aid package for low-income students, and the program should be maintained and expanded. Access to affordable loan programs reduces students' reliance on private bank loans, which relieves the debt burden on students over the long term.

### ***Improve Collection of Hate Crimes Data***

Every year, more than half a million students endure bias-motivated slurs, vandalism, threats, and physical assaults on college campuses.<sup>x</sup> The FBI typically documents almost 10,000 hate crimes every year, and other estimates range as high as 200,000.<sup>xi</sup> To increase awareness of hate crimes on college campuses, the 1998 Higher Education Act required all colleges and universities to collect and report hate crime statistics to the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) of the U.S. Department of Education. Currently, 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 definition of hate crimes and the HEA definition. The FBI definition includes several types of offenses omitted by the HEA definition. These include arson, larceny/theft, intimidation, and destruction/damage/vandalism.<sup>xii</sup> The omission of these crimes result in significant gaps in OPE data and substantial inconsistencies between FBI and OPE statistics. Improved data would give parents and students a more accurate sense of campus safety, and education institutions a better picture of their campus climate. NCWGE supports amending the HEA hate crime definition to align it with the definition used by the FBI.

NCWGE would like to thank you for your attention to these issues as members of the House Committee on Education and Labor work towards reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. We look forward to working with members of the committee to incorporate additional provisions that guarantee that every woman can pursue higher education regardless of her background. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lisa Maatz at 202-785-7720 or Jocelyn Samuels at 202-588-5180.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz  
Chair, NCWGE  
American Association of University Women  
202-785-7720



Jocelyn Samuels  
Vice-Chair, NCWGE  
National Women's Law Center  
202-588-5180

cc: Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
cc: House Committee on Education and Labor

---

<sup>i</sup> The College Board. *Trends in Student Aid*, 2006. p. 17.

- 
- <sup>ii</sup> U.S. Department of Education. 2004-2005 Federal Pell Grant Program End-of-Year Report. <http://www.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell0405.pdf> Accessed December 14, 2006.
- <sup>iii</sup> American Council on Education. *Minorities in Higher Education: 22nd Annual Status Report, 2006*.
- <sup>iv</sup> West, Martha S. and John W. Curtis. "AAUP Faculty Gender Equity Indicators 2006." American Association of University Professors. <http://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/63396944-44BE-4ABA-9815-5792D93856F1/0/AAUPGenderEquityIndicators2006.pdf> Accessed December 18, 2006.
- <sup>v</sup> National Campus Children's Centers. 2004 <http://www.campuschildren.org/policy/fact2004.html>
- <sup>vi</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 1993/2003 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study.
- <sup>vii</sup> Price, Derek V. 2004. *Borrowing Inequality: Race, Class, and Student Loans*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers.
- <sup>viii</sup> A tax credit is a direct reduction in tax liability, independent of tax bracket. For example, a \$1,815 tax credit lowers an individual's tax liability by \$1,815. A tax deduction is an adjustment to income, on which the individual is paying tax. A tax credit is better but is also more expensive.
- <sup>ix</sup> American Council on Education. "Bush Budget Proposal Is a Mixed Blessing: More Money for Pell Grants, Increase in Student Loan Limits, Cuts in Pre-College Programs." February 10, 2005. <http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=3550&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm> Accessed December 18, 2006.
- <sup>x</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center. "10 Ways to Fight Hate on College Campuses." 2004. [www.tolerance.org/campus](http://www.tolerance.org/campus) December 14, 2006.
- <sup>xi</sup> Harlow, C.W. "Hate Crime Reported by Victims and Police." Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. November 2005, NCJ 209911. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/hcrvp.pdf>. Accessed December 14, 2006.
- <sup>xiii</sup> FBI. "Hate Crime Statistics 2005: Universal Crime Reporting." <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2005/methodology.htm> Accessed December 14, 2006.