

CLASP

CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

March 4, 2008

Honorable Edward Kennedy, Chairman
Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee
U.S. Senate
664 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

Honorable Michael Enzi, Ranking Member
Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee
U.S. Senate
835 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

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

The undersigned organizations are writing to thank you for your work to reauthorize the Higher Education Act and ask you to retain four key provisions from the House bill as conferees meet to reconcile S. 1642 and H.R. 4137. Student aid represents the largest single federal investment in workforce education, with community colleges providing the majority of those services. By building a more skilled workforce, these programs will help business and industry compete globally and help workers earn enough to support their families.

- **Attach a Student Success Grant to every Pell Grant to ensure that students receive the services they need to stay in college.** Too many students fail to complete college. For example, six years after enrolling at two-year public colleges, nearly half (44 percent) of Pell Grant recipients do not have a credential and are no longer enrolled. The House bill's Student Success Grants would pilot the concept of coupling intensive, student success services with every Pell Grant. Targeted to colleges with many lower-skilled students, every student in the pilot would receive both a Pell Grant and a \$1,500 Student Success Grant to offset the costs to the college of program innovation and student services to help those students complete, such as Student Success Coordinators to provide frequent one-on-one advising and support, extra tutoring, and college success courses.
- **Provide Bridges from Jobs to Careers grants to colleges to help lower-skilled students complete occupational credentials.** More than 60 percent of young community college students need to improve reading, writing, or math skills before they can do college-level work and yet far too few complete these developmental (remedial) courses. These grants will help colleges create "bridge" programs that customize developmental education curricula to specific occupational programs, an approach that can increase persistence and completion. The grants will also enable colleges to innovate in other ways, such as by accelerating

developmental education (e.g. students move through two remedial courses in a single class), blending developmental education with college-level curricula and instruction, providing intensive counseling and advising, and improving the quality of teaching in these types of courses.

- **Provide Business Workforce Partnership grants to colleges to strengthen ties between for-credit course offerings and business workforce needs.** Colleges often lack the “venture capital” to start up new, credit-bearing programs that can respond to business workforce needs because state funding and federal financial aid typically only flow after students are enrolled in programs. The House bill’s Business Workforce Partnerships initiative creates partnerships of colleges, local workforce boards, employers and where applicable, unions, to map and develop career and educational pathways, link credit-bearing college programs to business workforce needs, adapt college offerings to workers’ schedules, expand worksite learning opportunities, and assist students with job placement. While similar to the Senate bill’s Job Skill Training in High Growth Occupations or Industries program, the House initiative places more emphasis on pathways for students with lower-skills and on preparation for jobs that can offer family-supporting wages and results in transferable credit so that workers can ultimately earn a degree.
- **Automatically allow dislocated workers to use estimated current year income when applying for federal financial aid.** Eligibility and need for federal financial aid are calculated according to prior year income. This does not make sense for dislocated workers as by definition their income has changed dramatically since the previous year. Although financial aid administrators have the discretion to allow estimates of current year income to be used under special circumstances, too few dislocated workers know to ask that this professional judgment be used. Given that over 96 percent of students apply for financial aid electronically, a simple check off box on the electronic Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) can easily allow dislocated workers to have their financial aid calculated using estimated current year income and will guarantee these workers receive the financial aid they deserve.

We look forward to working with you to ensure these important provisions are included in the HEA conference bill. Thank you for your valuable efforts to expand access and promote success in postsecondary education for low-income students.

Sincerely,