

CLASP

CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

July 20, 2009

The Honorable George Miller
Chair, Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller,

The Center for Law and Social Policy is writing to express its support of HR 3221, the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act. CLASP's mission is to develop and advocate for policies at the federal, state and local levels that improve the lives of low income people. We believe 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. CLASP also supports the Early Learning Challenge Fund, for which we sent a letter of support last week.

In particular, we commend the committee for addressing the following issues in the bill, which will transform the higher education system to achieve better outcomes:

- Increasing the federal commitment to student persistence and completion among those underrepresented in higher education through the creation of the College Access and Completion Innovation Fund;
- Making college more affordable for low-income and nontraditional students by increasing the Pell Grant and indexing it to inflation;
- Simplifying access to financial aid;
- Developing a competitive grant program for community colleges to:
 - create and expand programs, in partnership with employers, that provide relevant job-skill training connected to high-wage occupations;
 - create workforce programs and pathways that that blend basic skills and occupational training and integrate developmental education and for-credit coursework, ultimately leading to industry-recognized credentials;
 - strengthen linkages between higher education and adult education, including dual enrollment approaches; and
 - provide the supportive services necessary for students to succeed.

Although the bill makes significant advances in ensuring more low-income students will persist and complete higher education, it could be strengthened in the following ways:

- In the College Access and Completion Fund and the Community College Initiative, underrepresented students should be defined explicitly and this definition should include working adults and out-of-school youth without a high school diploma.

- Given that access and completion are largely challenges for underrepresented students, the College Access and Completion Fund should be solely focused on this population rather than “particularly for students from groups that are underrepresented in postsecondary education.”
- In the College Access and Completion Fund, as in the Community College Initiative, postsecondary education should be defined to include programs “that lead to a postsecondary degree, certificate, or industry-recognized credential leading to a skilled occupation in a high-demand industry.”
- Under the Community College Initiative, add to the use of funds section (503(f)) developing articulation agreements and other means of easing the transfer of credit between non-credit and credit coursework.
- In the Community College Initiative use of funds section (503(f)(2)), we are concerned that the emphasis on “high-wage occupations” does not mention providing pathways to high-wage occupations, thus potentially limiting the ability of lower-skilled individuals to access such academic or training programs. Therefore, we recommend adding the following language to the provision—“(2) Expanding, enhancing, or creating academic programs or training programs, which may be carried out in partnership with employers, that provide relevant job-skill training...for high-wage occupations, *or those that will lead to such wages*, in high-demand industries or occupations.” Similar language in Section 503(f)(6)(b) should we changed to read: “increase the provision of training for students to enter *or advance toward* high-wage occupations in high-demand industries.” [Additions in italics.]
- In Section 503(f)(4) of the Community College Initiative, prioritize funds for colleges that will serve low-income nontraditional students with one or more of the following characteristics: are the first generation in their family to attend college; have delayed enrollment in college; have dependents; are independent; or are out-of-school youth without a high school diploma.

Thank you for your efforts to expand opportunities for low-income and nontraditional students to access and succeed in postsecondary education and training so that they may reach family-supporting employment. This legislation is a monumental step toward increasing opportunities for millions of students.

Sincerely,

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