

nassgap

national association of state student grant and aid programs

www.nassgap.org (571) 239-0511

Bart Astor, Director, Washington Office

April 13, 2007

House Committee on Education and Labor
Attn: HEA Recommendations
B-346 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Miller:

The National Association of State Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP) is pleased to provide its HEA Title IV reauthorization recommendations.

NASSGAP is a not-for-profit tax-exempt organization that represents the administering agencies for state-sponsored higher education student grant, scholarship and other aid programs. In 2005-06, NASSGAP member states and territories provided nearly \$8 billion to students, with 73 percent of the grant aid distributed based on financial need.

NASSGAP member agencies also administer the federal Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) program, through a matching funds mechanism. States match federal dollars on a \$2 (state)-to-\$1(federal) for all federal funding above \$30 million. All LEAP funds are need-based and are received by students as states receive no administrative funding from the federal allotments. LEAP grants are substantial, averaging \$1,734 in 2004-05; and, the grants are targeted to the poorest students as nearly 60 percent of student recipients had family incomes under \$20,000.

I am enclosing a LEAP fact sheet which provides more detail on this successful partnership program. We are convinced that LEAP can continue to help close the college participation gap if funded at adequate levels. We also support proposals to strengthen the program by giving states incentives to add private sector and college partners to bring college admissions and financial aid information to students and families as early as middle school.

NASSGAP members are dedicated to facilitating the aid application process for students through simplification. We are concerned, however, that some discussions of FAFSA simplification seem to conclude that states are causing some of the student aid application complications, and would resist efforts to further simplify the process. Nothing could be further from the truth.

President
Mary Ann Welch
Rhode Island Higher
Education Assistance
Authority
560 Jefferson Blvd
Warwick, RI 02886
(401) 736-1171
mawelch@riheaa.org

President-Elect
Marilyn Cargill
Vermont Student
Assistance
Corporation
P.O. Box 2000
Champlain Mill
Winooski, VT 05404
(802) 655-9602
cargill@vsac.org

Secretary
Vicki Merkel
Oregon Student
Assistance
Commission
1500 Valley River Dr,
Suite 100
Eugene, OR 97401
(541) 687-7385
vicki.b.merkel@state.or.us

Treasurer
Lee Andes
State Council of Higher
Education for Virginia
James Monroe Bldg 10th
Floor
101 North 14th Street
Richmond, VI 23219
(804) 225-2614
leecandes@schev.edu

Past-President
Melanie Amrhein
Louisiana Office of
Student Financial
Assistance
PO Box 91202
Baton Rouge, LA
70821
(225) 922-3269
mamrhein@osfa.state.la.us

Member-at-Large
Lois Hollis
Texas Higher Education
Coordinating Board
P.O. Box 12788
Capital Station
Austin, TX 78711
(512) 427-6465
lois.hollis@theceb.state.tx.us

Member-at-Large
Stephanie Butler
Alaska Commission on
Postsecondary Education
PO Box 110505
Juneau, AK 99811-0505
(907) 465-6743
stephanie_butler@acpe.state.ak.us

The 1992 HEA amendments provided states the opportunity to simplify student aid application by integrating state aid application with the FAFSA. The law allowed adding a few “common” state program application questions to the FAFSA. Those common questions were identified by NASSGAP through survey research and negotiations with its members. Adding the common questions allowed most states (and likely some colleges) to eliminate the need for supplemental fee-based student aid application forms, making comprehensive and free aid application a reality for students. Continuing the inclusion of the state questions on the FAFSA was confirmed in the 1998 HEA amendments.

As a result of these efforts, only five states have a supplemental aid application. One state, New York (with Education Department approval), has further integrated its aid application process with the FAFSA by offering students an opportunity to complete the state aid application at the same time they fill out the e-FAFSA. This simplifies and expedites the award process while allowing online edits to reduce errors. NASSGAP recommends that Congress require ED to develop a “smart” e-FAFSA process that would extend such benefits to students in all states.

We thank you again for the opportunity to provide input for the HEA reauthorization process, and would be happy to provide further details.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Welch
President

Cc: Congressmen McKeon, Hinojosa, Keller