

nassgap

national association of state student grant and aid programs

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Bart Astor, Director, Washington Office

May 1, 2007

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Attn: HEA Recommendations
SD-428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6300

Dear Senator Kennedy:

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 almost three-quarters 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.

NASSGAP supports S. 938, the Accessing College through Comprehensive Early Outreach and State Partnerships Act, introduced on March 20, 2007 by Senator Jack Reed (RI). This bill would strengthen the LEAP 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.

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NASSGAP members are dedicated to facilitating the aid application process for students through simplification. We are concerned, however, that there is a perception 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.

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 many 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

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Cc: Senator Enzi