



nassgap

national association of state student grant and aid programs
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August 22, 2014

The Honorable Tom Harkin
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Harkin,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Higher Education Affordability Act draft released last month. The National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP) represents state agencies that operate major federal and state student aid programs and outreach activities. In 2012-13, states made over 4 million awards representing nearly \$9.6 billion in state student grant aid. Over three-quarters of the state-sponsored student grants were need-based.

NASSGAP sees a major part of its mission being to integrate the delivery and awareness of federal and state aid in a manner that:

- Maximizes the number of valuable degrees and certificates earned by students;
- Prudently manages the cost to taxpayers; and
- Produces a workforce with the 21st century skills necessary to fill the positions that employers need.

We strive to accomplish this by sharing best practices among our members, designing programs that complement federal student aid programs, and customizing them to best meet the needs of constituent students and families.

NASSGAP is pleased to see some signs of bipartisan, bicameral consensus on such issues as restoring year-round Pell Grants, improving financial literacy and loan counseling services to students and to parent borrowers, and using 'prior-prior' year tax information to help students and families file the FAFSA earlier and understand how financial aid packages could reduce their net cost in evaluating college options, potentially before applying to colleges.

We are also pleased that the HEAA proposes to establish a State Federal College Affordability Partnership (SFCAP). This program is especially needed as the recent trend has been to discontinue funding of successful federal-state partnerships such as the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) program (not funded since FFY10) and the College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) program (funding proposed to be eliminated for FFY15).



We strongly disagree, however, with the proposed exclusion of state student grant aid from the calculation of state operating support for higher education. State student grant aid is inextricably linked with supporting access and affordability in higher education. The majority of states award grants using the same federal methodology used to award Pell Grants and other federal aid. We are not sure how any state investment in higher education could be better aligned with the goals of access and affordability than through state student grant aid, particularly need-based aid. We strongly encourage you to strike subparagraph (i) from Section 499-2(3)(B) on page 470 and re-letter the succeeding subparagraphs.

In fact, states have been innovative leaders in exploring how best to leverage investments in education. As you know from the recent hearing on the role of states in higher education, states have experimented with approaches to incenting students and/or higher education institutions to improve retention and completion rates. We encourage the Senate to consider at least piloting some of the many successful state programs; NASSGAP supports the President's call for a State Higher Education Performance Fund program. NASSGAP also supports Senator Reed's Partnerships for Affordability and Student Success Act as a means of coordinating federal and state student aid programs to achieve the best outcomes for students.

Finally, NASSGAP members have successfully implemented initiatives and programs that reward on-time completion with loan forgiveness and reduce student indebtedness through better counseling. We would be happy to discuss with you and your staff any or all of the state initiatives that could serve as models for improving the delivery of student aid to students and their families. We look forward to working with you, your staff, and other Members of Congress to enact a Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that will best meet the needs of current and future students.

Thank you again for your attention to these matters.

Best regards,

Christine Zuzack
President
NASSGAP