



June 20, 2014

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

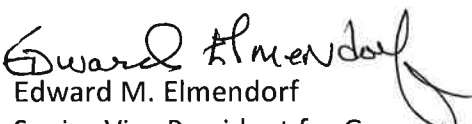
Dear Mr. Chairman,

I write on behalf of the membership of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities to thank you for your decades-long leadership on higher education policy, and to offer our support for your blueprint for reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

The discussion draft of the Higher Education Affordability Act addresses a broad range of challenges facing American higher education, and proposes thoughtful policy solutions based on the Committee's extensive review of the facts and its bipartisan series of hearings on the issues. The proposed legislation includes a number of critically important provisions that, once enacted, would go a long way toward making a college education more accessible and more affordable for students and families. Chief among these is the proposed Federal-State Matching Grant program, which would provide a voluntary, but powerful, incentive for states to do their fair share in supporting public higher education. In addition, the bill would carefully expand access by restoring year-round Pell grants and ability-to-benefit eligibility for federal aid. We are also pleased to see new provisions to promote and evaluate promising innovations in higher education, including new authorizations for competency-based programs and grants to promote affordability. The proposed legislation also adds much-needed program integrity provisions, which would significantly improve institutional accountability.

Beyond the impressive substance of your legislation, we are also grateful for the process the Committee has adopted as it moves forward. This legislation is based on extensive fact-finding and investigative efforts, as well as on the lengthy record of bipartisan hearings held during the past year. We appreciate the Committee's decision to collect and review comments on the discussion draft before it proceeds with a final draft, and stand ready to work with you and all members of the Committee in that effort.

Sincerely,

  
Edward M. Elmendorf  
Senior Vice President for Government Relations  
And Policy Analysis