

October 28, 2019

The Honorable Bobby Scott  
Chairman  
House Education and Labor Committee  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Scott:

As organizations representing the voices of students, families, and consumers, we are writing to applaud your proposed changes in the proposed College Affordability Act related to the requirements for accrediting agency recognition, and to urge you to pass those final versions in a committee vote to report the bill to the full U.S. House of Representatives.

This section of the legislation, as proposed, would ensure accrediting agencies at least incorporate student outcomes into their regular reviews of institutions. To date, accrediting agencies have fallen far short of this, to the significant detriment of students and taxpayers.<sup>1</sup> Some set few clear expectations for the colleges they approve, and rarely take action--even against the poorest-performing colleges. Others fall short when it comes time to enforce the standards they do have, perpetuating the abuses of colleges that persistently fail to serve their students well and wasting student aid dollars in programs that leave students worse off than they were. Almost none use the same metrics, so that it's impossible to know whether an accrediting agency's stamp of approval is meaningful. And at a time when we must do more to close persistent gaps in access to and success in higher education for students of color and low-income students, a very small number of accreditors considers equity at all when looking at institutions' outcomes.

The College Affordability Act takes a meaningful step toward solving these problems. By allowing accreditors to select the outcomes measures they will use for institutions--and the thresholds they set for those measures--the proposed legislation is a far cry from the "federal intrusion" some have claimed. And by permitting accreditors to adjust those measures to vary across institutions, it avoids a one-size-fits-all application. Instead, it simply requires accreditors to pick a minimum bar for how well their students fare and incorporate that into their existing review process. It also asks for a focus on equity that is sorely missing from the current accreditation system.

Accreditation can only be considered a meaningful marker of educational quality if it doesn't reward failing colleges with access to over \$120 billion each year in federal financial aid. But for the many hundreds of thousands of students who attended low-quality institutions that left them to drop out, deeply in debt for a virtually worthless degree, or even that closed without warning before they could

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<sup>1</sup> Antoinette Flores, "How College Accreditors Miss the Mark on Student Outcomes," Center for American Progress, April 25, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-postsecondary/reports/2018/04/25/449937/college-accredit-ors-miss-mark-student-outcomes/>.

graduate, accrediting agencies have fallen far short of that promise. It's time for a change -- and the College Affordability Act's accreditation provisions will move that change forward.

Sincerely,

Americans for Financial Reform

Center for American Progress

Higher Learning Advocates

New America

The Education Trust

The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS)

Third Way

Veterans Education Success

Young Invincibles