



PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
655 K Street NW, Ste. 700, Washington, DC 20001
PAEAonline.org • 703-548-5538

September 19, 2018

The Honorable Robert Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and
the Workforce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Davis
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Higher Education and
Workforce Development
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Members Scott and Davis:

On behalf of the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), representing the 236 accredited PA programs throughout the United States, we are writing to thank you for your recent introduction of the Aim Higher Act. This legislation is an important step forward toward ensuring that the Higher Education Act reflects the current state of PA education and serves the needs of PA students. As Congress continues its efforts to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, we look forward to continued opportunities to work with the committee to ensure that barriers to the preparation of a high-quality PA workforce are eliminated.

We would like to express our positions on the following provisions of the Aim Higher Act:

Loan and Loan Repayment Options

In our December 2017 letter responding to the introduction of H.R. 4508, the PROSPER Act, we expressed significant concerns regarding the bill's proposed elimination of Public Service Loan Forgiveness, as well as its proposal to cap borrowing for Grad PLUS loans. Given the considerable costs associated with PA education, we were deeply troubled by the implications that this would have for PA students seeking to avoid higher-interest private loan options and practice in public service capacities. We were pleased to see that the Aim Higher Act preserves Public Service Loan Forgiveness and protects the current Grad PLUS option. Further, we are supportive of the Aim

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Higher Act's elimination of unnecessary origination fees and its reinstatement of the Perkins loan program.

With regards to annual and aggregate loan limits for Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford loans, however, **we are concerned that PA students would continue to be excluded from the list of health professions students, including medical, pharmacy, public health, and clinical psychology students, among others, eligible for higher borrowing limits in this iteration of the bill.** Under current law, PA students face comparable costs relative to their peers in the health professions while being subject to the borrowing limits of non-health professions graduate students. This inequity forces PA students to rely on loan options with higher interest rates and less favorable repayment terms, thus increasing out-of-pocket costs. As this effort to reauthorize the Higher Education Act moves forward, **we urge you to ensure that PA students are included among their peers in the health professions for the purposes of Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford loans.**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Other Minority-Serving Institutions

Promoting the development of a diverse PA workforce with the skills to provide culturally competent care to patients is a top priority for PAEA, and we are pleased to see that the Aim Higher Act recommits to the goal of developing the capacity of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), among other minority-serving institutions. We were particularly pleased to learn that the Aim Higher Act would place renewed emphasis on faculty development at HSIs by authorizing "financial support to graduate students planning to pursue academic careers who desire to become faculty" at these institutions. Facilitating faculty development is crucial to ensuring that the best possible instruction is provided to PA students, and we are in strong support of this provision.

To further enhance the diversity of the PA workforce, **we would advocate for additional changes to encourage PA program development at HBCUs and HSIs.** For instance,

- Sections 723 and 724 of the Higher Education Act should be amended to ensure that PA programs at HBCUs and predominantly black institutions are eligible for support.
- PA program development at HSIs could be facilitated by amending Section 514 of the Higher Education Act to prioritize funding of PA education programs.

Each of these potential amendments could significantly increase the diversity of the PA workforce with substantial dividends in terms of the health outcomes of underserved populations.

State Authorization



In our comments regarding the PROSPER Act in December 2017, we emphasized the burden that existing state authorization requirements have placed on PA programs seeking to educate students in other states for clinical rotations. At a time when PA programs throughout the country are facing growing clinical site shortages, PAEA is committed to addressing barriers such as state authorization regulations that impede program operations with no clear benefit in regard to educational quality. We urge the committee to fully consider the impact of these barriers as the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act advances.

Competency-Based Education

PAEA is supportive of the implementation of competency-based education as a means of efficiently and effectively preparing PA students to enter the health workforce. We were pleased that the Aim Higher Act recognizes the value of CBE by authorizing competency-based education demonstration projects and establishing the Competency-Based Education Council. Shifting from a traditional education process, in which a required amount of “seat time” determines the pace of student advancement, represents a natural evolution of PA education, and we commend you for your recognition of this trend, in accordance with appropriate accreditation standards, in the Aim Higher Act.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Aim Higher Act and look forward to working with the committee to ensure that the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act meets the needs of students, educators, and, ultimately, patients. For additional information or should you have questions, please contact PAEA Chief Policy and Research Officer Dave Keahey at dkeahey@PAEAonline.org or (703) 667-4339.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa Mustone Alexander".

Lisa Mustone Alexander, EdD, MPH, PA-C
President

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Timi Agar Barwick".

Timi Agar Barwick, MPM
Chief Executive Officer