



PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
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October 25, 2019

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

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
House Committee on Education and Labor
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx:

On behalf of the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), we are writing to offer our comments on H.R. 4674 - the College Affordability Act of 2019. PAEA represents all 246 accredited PA programs throughout the United States. As the Education and Labor committee works to reauthorize and amend the Higher Education Act, we welcome continued opportunities to work with the committee to ensure that a final reauthorization bill fully reflects the evolving needs of students, faculty, and patients.

Student Aid Reform

Ensuring that students have affordable access to the master's level training required to enter the PA profession is a top priority for PAEA and our member programs. To that end, we would like to express our strong support for the inclusion of measures such as the elimination of origination fees on federal loans, the protection of Grad PLUS as a borrowing option, and the reauthorization of Perkins loans for graduate students, all of which will ultimately serve to limit out-of-pocket costs for PA students. Additionally, PAEA is strongly supportive of the inclusion of a provision allowing disadvantaged students to use remaining Pell grant eligibility to help finance their first graduate-level degree. As PA programs continue to work to recruit disadvantaged students more likely to practice in underserved communities following graduation, this would be a significant step forward to increase access to PA education.

PAEA is also strongly encouraged by the structural reforms included in H.R. 4674 regarding the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program. According to PAEA's most recent Student Report, 36% of students intending to enter a federal or state loan forgiveness program intend to utilize PSLF. As such, it

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is critical to ensure that the plans of graduating students to extend access to care to underserved communities through employment in non-profit health care settings are not deterred by continued high denial rates for forgiveness under the PSLF program. We applaud the inclusion of measures to address the current shortcomings of the program such as allowing borrowers to count previous payments towards PSLF following enrollment in the new income-based repayment plan established in the bill and creating a formal appeal process to allow borrowers to contest denied forgiveness applications.

While the College Affordability Act makes significant strides toward lowering out-of-pocket costs for students, we believe that additional bipartisan steps can be taken to improve access to PA education. **Specifically, a final HEA reauthorization package should address the long-standing disparity between PA students and their peers in health professions programs regarding annual Unsubsidized Stafford loan borrowing limits.** Under current law, PA students are restricted to the same annual loan limit of \$20,500 reserved for non-health professions graduate students under the Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford loan program. However, according to the most recent survey of PA programs conducted by PAEA, the median total tuition, on average, for 27-month, private PA programs is \$91,630. Ensuring that PA students are not forced into higher-interest loan options as a result of being considered non-health professions graduate students is a bipartisan principle that has been included in Rep. Karen Bass' H.R. 1685 - the Physician Assistant Higher Education Modernization Act and the PROSPER Act, introduced in the 115th Congress. **We urge the committee to institute borrowing parity for PA students under the Stafford Unsubsidized loan program in alignment with their peers in the health professions in any final HEA reauthorization bill.**

Promoting Diversity

One of PAEA's highest priorities as an organization is promoting diversity in PA education to ensure that patients being served by graduates are able to provide high-quality, culturally competent care to their communities in a manner that promotes health equity. As such, we are encouraged that H.R. 4674 includes substantial and permanent investments in historically black colleges and universities, tribally controlled colleges and universities, and other minority serving institutions and prioritizes innovation in instructional delivery at these institutions. **Given the historic underrepresentation of African American, Hispanic, and other minority students in medical education, we urge you to include explicit language stating that funds available to support STEM program development at said institutions may be used for physician assistant education programs.**

If you have any questions about our comments or require additional information, please contact Director of Government Relations Tyler Smith at tsmith@PAEAonline.org or at (703) 667-4356.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan Bowser". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jonathan Bowser, MS, PA-C
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara S. Fletcher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

Sara Fletcher, PhD
Interim Chief Executive Officer