

December 8, 2017

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chair
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Foxx and Ranking Member Scott:

With the recent introduction of H.R. 4508, the *Promoting Real Opportunity, Success and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act*, the member organizations of the Federation of Associations of Schools of the Health Professions (FASHP) respectfully request that the Committee fully consider higher education policies that support and strengthen health professions education and the future health care workforce as negotiations on the reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* progress.

FASHP was created in 1968 as a forum for representatives of health professions education institutions to address education's role in organizational patterns of health care; to encourage effective collaboration among the professions in education and practice; to prepare health professions education for the future; and to serve as liaison with other organizations sharing an interest in health professions education. FASHP is comprised of 16 associations representing a health professions education community that includes 4,786 programs, institutions, hospitals, and health systems, and more than 1.4 million students, faculty, clinicians, administrators, residents, and researchers.

The introduction of the *PROSPER Act* provides an opportunity to recognize unique challenges of health professions students, including debt burdens. As you may know, health professions students often graduate with relatively high debt compared to other graduate students. Unlike other career paths, the high debt burden of health professions education is frequently compounded by years of post-graduate training, which is required for certain professionals to be licensed/certified by a state to practice. As a result, total student loan repayment often exceeds two to three times the amount borrowed due to the accumulated interest/high interest rates, in addition to other unavoidable costs related to pursuing a health professions education.

As the nation faces a health care workforce shortage, particularly in medically underserved areas, it is vital to retain and recruit a health professions workforce that will be able to collectively meet the growing needs and challenges of our nation. Federal policies that support a crucial pathway for future health professionals who desire to help address the widening public health care gaps, particularly in health professions shortages across the nation, is a timely necessity.

Earlier this year, FASHP shared the below policy priorities with the Chair and Ranking Member of the Higher Education and Workforce Development Subcommittee. In sharing these with you and highlighting them again, we urge the Committee to strongly consider the impact of changes in H.R. 4508 on health professions students:

- Continue public service scholarship and loan repayment programs for health professional students and graduates to increase the health professions workforce in underserved areas.
- Support a diverse health professions workforce that mirrors and provides culturally-competent health care to the nation's patient populations.
- Encourage the delivery of high-quality, evidence-based health promotion, disease prevention, and patient care through interprofessional education.
- Strengthen the health professions pipeline education programs with federal graduate and professional student loan and repayment options that do not discourage students from pursuing health professions education.
- Promote interagency collaboration to improve the effectiveness of the student aid programs at the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) health professions and nursing workforce programs to improve the supply, distribution, and diversity of the health care workforce and reduce unnecessary redundancies and administrative inefficiencies.
- Reinforce the distinct and principal role that academic accreditors play in the nation's educational quality and institutional education performance.
- Reduce administrative and financial burdens that regulatory barriers place on health professions schools and the students they educate by addressing administrative burdens for health professions schools' financial aid officers, strengthening the quality of the USDE's student loan servicing programs, and improving HRSA's loan and repayment programs, among other measures.

We stand ready and willing to serve as a resource in working towards a well-trained health care workforce equipped to meet the demands of the American health care system in the 21st century. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Pamela Murphy, AACOM Senior Vice President of Government Relations, at pmurphy@aacom.org. As developments around the *PROSPER Act* progress, FASHP looks forward to working closely with you on this critical legislation to ensure the nation's future health care workforce and their patients are well-served.

Sincerely,

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
 American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
 American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
 American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine
 American Dental Education Association
 Association of American Medical Colleges
 Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
 Association of Chiropractic Colleges
 Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
 Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions
 Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
 Association of University Programs in Health Administration
 Physician Assistant Education Association

Council on Social Work Education
American Psychological Association

CC: Members of the Committee on Education and the Workforce