

December 12, 2017

As a group of national and state early childhood organizations dedicated to increasing access to high-quality early childhood education, we know that the Higher Education Act plays a crucial role in the achievement of this goal. This important legislation supports not only students and parents, but also current and future early childhood educators working in all settings and states. Its reauthorization offers meaningful opportunities to increase the affordability, accessibility, and quality of higher education so that it better supports and prepares the teachers who are serving the youngest members of our next generation in schools, programs, classrooms, and homes across America.

Congress has been a powerful advocate for and generated a supportive, bipartisan track record on early learning. We are, however, deeply concerned about the many changes proposed in the PROSPER Act, as introduced in the House of Representatives on December 1, 2017, which we fear undermine this record of support.

First, while we appreciate continued support for the Child Care Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, this important program remains woefully underfunded. CCAMPIS is the only federal program that supports child care services for low-income parents in post-secondary education, and is vital for students to fully engage in learning and establish a path for future success. Its authorization should be raised to a minimum of \$250 million in order to begin to accommodate the unmet need for child care assistance for the one in four undergraduate students who are also parents.

In addition, this draft bill proposes to eliminate key provisions that support students enrolled in early childhood education preparation programs and those that improve programs that prepare early childhood educators and leaders, without identifying a pathway elsewhere to ensure a continued pipeline for high-quality early childhood educators. These provisions — the loss of which would be devastating to the early childhood workforce — include the sunset of Title II, TEACH grants, and loan forgiveness programs, including those for teachers and early childhood educators across settings in Perkins loans, and those in Public Service Loan Forgiveness programs, which encourage careers in education and service.

High quality education pathways into the early childhood workforce are critical to the early childhood field and the young children and families it serves. For that reason, we are concerned about “skin-in-the-game” provisions related to student loan repayments that may cause undue harm to the institutions serving students in early childhood pathways. These institutions, many of which are community colleges, have open-access policies and serve a majority nontraditional student population—individuals who are already working, have family responsibilities, and limited income. Likewise, our commitment to pathways supports apprenticeship opportunities that are tied to higher education, which is a commendable piece of the proposed act.

Yet we are concerned about an apprenticeship program meant to lead to high-wage professions; this design could exclude early childhood educators, essentially punishing them for choosing a profession in

which their earnings do not reflect the value of their highly-skilled work. Indeed, research shows that access to quality early learning and care saves taxpayers money, makes working families more economically secure, and prepares children to succeed in school, earn higher wages, and live healthier lives. By explicitly ensuring inclusion of teacher preparation in the design of a new apprenticeship program, the reauthorization of HEA would be strengthening access to quality early childhood education, which in turn supports working families and strengthens the economy.

High-quality early childhood programs provide important benefits to children, families and our nation's economy—and they depend on having skilled, supported, and knowledgeable early childhood educators. We have outlined our recommendations for a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that advances the quality of and access to early childhood education by attending to the early childhood educators themselves. We are confident that there are some shared priorities, including a goal of making federal student aid clear, flexible, accessible and effective, and ensuring that institutions of higher education are given space for innovation while being held accountable.

We look forward to working with Congress to build on these shared priorities, while addressing our significant areas of concern, in order to ensure that the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act helps to build a stronger early childhood education profession and sets our nation's children on a path to success.

Child Care Aware of America

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Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

National Association for the Education of Young Children

National Human Services Assembly

Northern Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children

NYS Association for the Education of Young Children

Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children

Save the Children Action Network

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