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January 29, 2008

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman
Education and Labor Committee
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Howard “Buck” McKeon
Ranking Member
Education and Labor Committee
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Miller and Ranking Member McKeon:

On behalf of the undersigned presidents, representing public Historically Black Colleges and Universities, we write to urge strong support for the amendment offered by Representatives Grijalva and Bishop during the committee mark-up of the bill to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (H.R. 4137) that would extend the tracking of the federal student loan Cohort Default Rate (CDR) by one year.

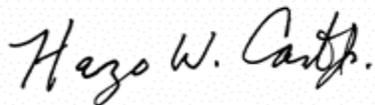
This amendment will provide more meaningful and accurate information that will help institutions, lenders, and the Department of Education help students avoid student loan default. Default is avoidable, and we know that student borrowers usually default because they are not aware of all of the student loan repayment options afforded to them under the law. This Congress, in fact, has provided more opportunities, such as the new Income Based Repayment program, to help low-income student borrowers make their payments more manageable as to avoid default.

Student borrowers who default experience severe consequences. They become ineligible for loan deferments, forbearance or forgiveness- even though these may have been options available to them before defaulting! In addition, they become ineligible for other student financial aid, including Pell Grants. Furthermore, they can be sued by guaranty agencies, have their wages garnished, and have their future federal tax refunds seized. All of this is avoidable. And, the first step is to ensure we have more accurate data about student loan default rates. With more accurate data, we can identify those students who need more information about their repayment options.

While we understand some of the concerns regarding this change, we urge Congress to keep this provision as part of the bill to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. We do not support striking the provision. Rather, we support enacting this more accurate measure as provided in the amendment, and, if needed, providing technical assistance to schools that have a CDR that is approaching sanction levels. In addition, we support requiring technical assistance offered by the Department of Education and requiring lenders to inform students about their repayment options in a more consistent and consumer friendly way. Currently, lenders have no incentive for helping to prevent students from defaulting on their student loans.

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of our nation's HBCUs and for ensuring college access for millions of young Americans.

Sincerely,



Dr. Hazo W. Carter, Jr.
President
West Virginia State University
Chair of the Council of 1890s Presidents &
Chancellors, representing 20 Public Land-Grant
Historically Black Colleges and Universities*



Dr. Edward Elmendorf
Senior Vice President, Government Relations
American Association of State Colleges and
Universities

On behalf of:

Dr. Mickey Burnim
President
Bowie State University

Dr. Everette J. Freeman
President
Albany State University

Dr. Willie J. Gilchrist
Chancellor
Elizabeth City State University

Dr. Horace A. Judson
President
Grambling State University

Dr. Allen Sessoms
President
Delaware State University

Dr. Albert L. Walker
President
Bluefield State College

*** Council of 1890s Colleges and Universities**

Alabama A&M University (AL)
Tuskegee University (AL)
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (AR)
University of District of Columbia (DC)
Delaware State University (DE)
Florida A&M University (FL)
Fort Valley State University (GA)
Kentucky State University (KY)
Southern University and A&M College System
(LA)

Alcorn State University (MS)
University of Maryland Eastern Shore (MD)
Lincoln University (MO)
North Carolina A&T State University (NC)
Langston University (OK)
South Carolina State University (SC)
Tennessee State University (TN)
Prairie View A&M University (TX)
Virginia State University (VA)
University of Virgin Islands (VI)
West Virginia State University (WV)

cc: Members of the Education & Labor Committee