NEC Higher Education Committee
Conference Call with Senate HELP Committee Staff

Thank you to those who participated in this morning’s call with Senate HELP staff on the reauthorization of HEA. We had a great discussion regarding Senate HELP Committee efforts to move forward with reauthorization. Below is a summary of our conversation.

Participants (sorry, I did miss a few):

- Senate HELP Committee Senior Policy Advisor Libby Masiuk
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  202-224-5501
- Martha Austin, Dartmouth College
- John Beahm, Jenzabar
- Julie Bolduc, Wheelock College
- Barbara Brittingham, CIHE of NEASC
- Amy Carroll, Brown University
- Javier Cevallos, Framingham State University
- Rita Colucci, Framingham State University
- Tom Cronin, UNH
- Suzanne Day, Harvard University
- Gail Dyer, Providence College
- Adam Edgerton, Salem State University Upward Bound
- Peter Gordon, National Association of College Stores (NACS)
- Jennifer Grodsky, Boston University
- Emily Heisig, New England Council
- Julie Lammers, American Student Assistance
- Adria Leach, Salem State University
- Tim Leshan, Northeastern University
- Steve Maurano, Providence College
We began the call with an introduction of current progress from Senate HELP Committee Senior Policy Advisor Libby Masiuk. Libby highlighted the 12 hearings held by the Committee over the last year specifically addressing HEA reauthorization. She also highlighted the discussion draft that Chairman Harkin put forth on June 25. The HELP Committee is asking for comments on that draft by August 29 and Libby asked our institutions to comment constructively with concerns. The NEC Higher Education Committee will be submitting comments on the discussion draft to the Senate HELP Committee. A draft of our language is attached here. Please provide feedback by August 22 to be included in our document.

- Libby said Chairman Harkin intends to turn that discussion draft into a bill this fall for consideration of comprehensive reauthorization of HEA. She noted that the draft focuses on affordability, reducing student loan debt, accountability and transparency.

Dr. Paula Rooney of Dean College asked what this timeline looked like for that bill.
- Libby responded that the Senate calendar was in question and, in an election year, it is hard to predict what schedule might be possible.

Suzanne Day of Harvard University asked about issues that were not in the draft, such as international education and teacher issues.
- Libby explained that the draft intentionally left out some issues on which the Committee is soliciting feedback. She noted that the Chairman is exploring the idea of a unit record system, though that is not yet in the draft bill. She also noted that current law would remain in place regarding title 6 funding if it is not changed in the reauthorization bill.

Dr. Paula Rooney of Dean College asked about the administration’s proposed rating system.
- Libby said that Chairman Harkin has focused on transparency and cost but has maintained that he would like to see the proposed system before he would support it. She also clarified that no rating system could be tied to federal financial aid without approval from Congress.

Peter Gordon of the National Association of College Stores asked if the Chairman would be scheduling a mark-up in the fall for the bill he plans to introduce.
- Libby noted that the timing of a mark up was uncertain as it is highly contingent on the Senate schedule. She also noted that, while the House has thus far taken a piecemeal approach to reauthorization, Chairman Harkin would strongly prefer a comprehensive bill.
Dr. Paula Rooney asked about support for alternative learning models in HEA reauthorization. She also asked how the bill would allow institutions to work with accreditors.

- Libby noted that the discussion draft included language on competency based learning. She said the Committee was very interested in these new efforts and wanted to hear from students and institutions about what models were successful. She also said the Committee was focused on increasing transparency through accreditation. She said that the public was not seeing “the fruits of your labors” in higher education.

Tim Leshan of Northeastern University followed up specifically regarding the use of the work-study program for alternative learning models.

- Libby said that the draft did not touch campus based aid such as Perkins, SEOG or work-study as the Committee wanted feedback about those issues.

Dr. Paula Rooney asked if simplification of reporting was a priority for reauthorization.

- Libby said that the Chairman was interested in the possibility of implementing a unit record system as a means to simplify reporting but that the Committee was also waiting to see the recommendations of a task force commissioned to consider the matter.

We asked if the HELP Committee would include legislation regarding sexual assault on campuses in the reauthorization legislation.

- Libby said that the recent bill (S.2692) offered by Senators Clair McCaskill (D-MO) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) was referred to the HELP Committee. She added that a hearing had been held on the issue in June. She said that currently the Committee is looking for feedback on the legislation to determine how best to move forward.

Eileen O’Leary of Stonehill College asked about year round Pell Grants. While year round Pell grants are proposed in the discussion draft, Eileen noted that the previous language had been restrictive and made it difficult to work with the Department of Education.

- Libby agreed that the previous language had led to unintended, increased costs for institutions and that new language was included in the new proposed legislation.

Dr. Paula Rooney ended the call by encouraging our members to weigh in with comments to the Senate HELP Committee regarding the reauthorization draft and to share those comments with the NEC Higher Education Committee. The NEC Higher Education Committee will be submitting comments on the discussion draft to the Senate HELP Committee. A draft of our language is attached here. Please provide feedback by August 22 to be included in our document.

Libby wrapped up by asking all participants to follow up with her and the Senate HELP Committee about specific interests and concerns. She provided her contact information (listed above) and said that the Committee welcomes feedback regarding the draft and needs to hear from institutions about what works and what does not.