



March 13, 2018

Dear Senators:

On behalf of the Federation of Associations of Schools of the Health Professions (FASHP), we strongly urge you to support health professions students and the patients they serve, as you continue to consider the reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* (HEA).

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 a liaison with other organizations with 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.

With the quick approval of H.R. 4508, the *Promoting Real Opportunity, Success and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act*, by the House Education and Workforce Committee in December, FASHP urges Congress to fully deliberate higher education policies that support and strengthen health professions education and the future health care workforce. Furthermore, we strongly urge you to reconsider proposed changes made to the PLUS loans for graduate and professional students (Grad PLUS) and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program for new borrowers in the *PROSPER Act* to ensure our nation has a necessary pipeline of students pursuing health professions careers.

In recent years, changes to the federal financial aid system, such as the elimination of the in-school interest subsidy on Federal Stafford loans for graduate students, have made graduate and professional education less affordable. Investing in the future health care workforce is in our national interest.

In addition to Federal Stafford loans, the majority of health professions students rely on Grad PLUS loans to finance their education. The proposed limit on borrowing in the *PROSPER Act* will force students to take out student loans from the private market, which typically have higher interest rates and limited repayment options, creating an additional barrier to entry, especially for those who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. As representatives of health professions education institutions, we are committed to producing a culturally-competent health

care workforce as this is vital to serving diverse communities across the country and these proposed changes will have an adverse effect on all the undersigned professions abilities to fulfill that mission. Therefore, federal financial aid policies should work to encourage and allow all students – regardless of their socioeconomic status – to pursue health professions careers.

Additionally, the PSLF Program is a critical vehicle to retain and recruit a health professions workforce that will be able to meet our nation’s growing health care needs and challenges. And of particular concern in the *PROSPER Act* is the elimination of the PSLF Program for new borrowers. Many health professions students take on significant debt, and if they pursue a career in public service – such as working in federally qualified health centers or in primary care serving vulnerable patients – they forgo potentially higher earnings. Since the creation of the PSLF Program in 2007, it has served as a recruitment tool and has encouraged health professions graduates to serve both rural and urban medically underserved communities. Furthermore, this program helps assist health professions students pursue their passion for working in communities in need while being able to receive loan relief.

As the health care needs of our nation grows, the need for a competent, diverse workforce only increases. HEA reauthorization will impact federal financial aid and the health professions pipeline for years to come and therefore, it is essential that programs that support these students are preserved and included in this reauthorization. Federal financial aid policies must support a pathway for health professions students to enter a health care workforce equipped to meet the nation’s evolving health care needs.

We appreciate your continued work to reauthorize the HEA and we look forward to working with you as this process continues to strengthen federal financial aid programs that support health professions students and the future health care workforce. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Pamela Murphy, AACOM Senior Vice President of Government Relations, at [pmurphy@aacom.org](mailto:pmurphy@aacom.org).

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  
American Physical Therapy Association

CC: House of Representatives