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July 30, 2008

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of more than 400 member institutions of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), I write to urge passage of the *Higher Education Opportunity Act*.

Five years in the making and ten years since the last reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* (HEA), AASCU is pleased to be supportive of this bipartisan effort to update the HEA.

There are many positive changes to current law in the bill, such as the year-round Pell grant, a State Maintenance of Effort provision, strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions, improved student loan counseling requirements, affirmation of institutional and accrediting body autonomy in the development of academic standards, and new institutional grant programs to strengthen college access – including a grant program for rural colleges.

With any 1,000-plus page bill, however, there are provisions that are of concern. AASCU will continue to follow the negotiated rule-making and implementation of the new law to mitigate any unintended consequences, particularly as it relates to students and the new private loan certification provisions, as well as the significant number of new institutional reporting requirements, many of which AASCU supports and are intended to result in positive policy changes.

AASCU has a long and proud tradition of representing colleges and universities that provide affordable college access to millions of students, many of whom demonstrate significant financial need. In addition, as public institutions, we honor the covenant between our public missions and our stakeholders—students, taxpayers, and policy makers—through transparency and accountability.

Sincerely,

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