SEPTEMBER 2019 PUBLIC POLICY UPDATE

Administration

US Department of Education Releases IDEA Guidance for Students with Disabilities in Dual Enrollment

(Courtesy of the College in High School Alliance)

On September 17, 2019, the US Department of Education released new guidance entitled "Increasing Postsecondary Opportunities and Success for Students and Youth with Disabilities."

The guidance clarifies how states and school districts can use federal IDEA funding to support students with disabilities participating in college in high school programs, such as dual enrollment and early college high school. The guidance can be accessed here.

The Long Path to a New Student Loan Repayment System

(Courtesy of the Center for American Progress)

Borrowers: A new way to repay your student loans is coming. Eventually. The downfalls of the current system have been well documented; it's complex and downright annoying for borrowers to navigate and expensive for the federal government to administer. An effort to create a new repayment platform began in 2014, but six years later, it's still not close to becoming a reality. Though the federal government often runs at a glacial pace, the process of revamping the way that 35 million federal student loan borrowers repay $1.2 trillion in debt has proved to be a Sisyphean task. The main reason? Industry has thrown its weight behind maintaining the status quo.

This column provides a brief narrative of how the government has tried to reform the repayment system, as well as a detailed timeline of its efforts and the forces that have stood in the way. The winding path to a new repayment system is not easy to follow and spans court documents, federal procurements, and federal legislation, but this column elucidates everything that goes into such a big, structural change—and all that consumers stand to lose if others stand in the way.

What the current repayment system looks like

Under the current repayment regime, borrowers interact almost entirely with their loan servicer to manage their accounts. Each servicer maintains its own website, proprietary back-end software, customer service training programs, protocol for counseling borrowers, analytics, and outreach strategies. When borrowers switch servicers, their account and all of the information attached to it must be correctly transmitted and set up in the new servicer's system—a process that requires significant manual processing. The borrower needs to similarly learn to navigate the new system and set up a new login and payment account. Even worse, when a borrower defaults, their account goes through multiple handoffs, pinging from a servicer to a default management company to at least one private collection agency (PCA). Should the borrower resolve the default, their account goes back into regular servicing, and the process starts all over again. The system is not only complex and expensive, but it also may have a real effect on delinquency and default rates.

The system doesn't do the federal government any favors, either. The Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA), which manages the loan program, enters relationships with servicers and PCAs through contracts, which are the primary vehicle for procuring external work across the federal government. These relationships aren't uncommon: In 2018, taxpayers provided about $550 billion in payments to contractors, which accounted for 40 percent of discretionary spending.

Though contracts can be a good tool for binding private entities to a set of practices, they are difficult to manage in a way that provides consumers with consistency and transparency. One of the major challenges is that FSA lacks access to servicers' and PCAs' back-end information systems, which are owned and maintained by the companies. Should FSA require information, it must put together a detailed request and, in some cases, pay for the extra work the contractor must perform. Perhaps worst of all, a system in which servicers operate with relative autonomy makes it extremely difficult for FSA to terminate relationships with any servicer, as the transfer of several million borrower accounts would create massive disruptions for borrowers and open up the potential for errors.

Oversight is an additional challenge. Audits require teams of FSA staff to conduct site visits with contractors to look into individual borrowers' records to determine if processes are being performed correctly. With more than 20 servicers and PCAs in the system and contracts lasting in excess of a decade, work on the repayment system alone requires significant funding and staffing, which FSA unfortunately lacks. The office, which manages every aspect of the student aid programs, from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid to school support, has roughly the same number of staffers as the Food and Nutrition Service and is smaller than the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and Government Accountability Office (GAO).

The long path toward reform

The Obama and Trump administrations have engaged in efforts to reform the system, including one to launch a single website where all 35 million Direct Loan borrowers will manage their accounts, make payments, and apply for repayment programs. FSA will finally be able to govern, track, and compare servicers' behavior under this new regime, called the Next Generation (NextGen) Financial Services Environment, in its current iteration. NextGen will create a single phone number, e-mail, and mailing address for communications, and borrowers will receive consistent communications no matter which servicer was assigned their account. It will also allow programs to be rolled out more quickly, instead of FSA having to communicate and manage implementation across multiple systems and servicers.

NextGen would still allow for multiple servicers and debt collectors, but it would provide big benefits for holding them accountable. Under a single portal, FSA will be able to more easily boot poor-performing contractors from the system with minimal disruption to the borrower, as the account will only need to be assigned to a new entity rather than completely transferred. Finally, borrowers who default on their debts will not be siphoned off into a different system; they will still be able to manage their account and speak with a customer service representative through the same system where they managed their loans while in repayment.

If NextGen sounds like a big shake-up, that's because it is. Though there is bipartisan support for NextGen, and many of the changes in it have been on the wish lists of consumer advocates—including former President Barack Obama and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)—for years, industry has tried to stand in the way of reform.

Outsize industry influence in the repayment system
NextGen is happening now, because contracts for all nine loan servicers are due to expire, thus new ones must be put into place. Servicing and collections contracts can last up to 12 years and collectively pay out hundreds of millions of dollars per contractor, which puts huge stakes on getting one. In this case, not only does a new repayment system require servicers to change up their business practices, thus costing them money in the short term, but it also means that entities could lose contracts altogether, potentially leading to significant blows to revenue, job losses, and even the termination of operations.

The Competition in Contracting Act (CICA) of 1984, which requires “full and open competition” for federal contracts, further burdens new proposals. CICA opens the door for all manner of protests and lawsuits by entities shut out of new awards, which often result in what one federal judge called a “firehose approach” to protests—that is, PCAs in particular protest on just about every grounds imaginable, hoping that one will stick and prevent a solicitation from going forward. While FSA has some contracting flexibility due to its status as a performance-based organization, it is not immune to challenges, which can take years to resolve. As more than 50 companies have been involved in servicing and collections over the past decade, it is all but guaranteed that any proposal from FSA will be met with protests and lawsuits, especially as FSA attempts to become more efficient and thus award fewer contracts.

Where things stand now
Since 2014, there have been countless protests with the GAO to stop NextGen. More than a dozen servicers and PCAs have taken FSA to court, with some mixed results—and a big price tag—for the government. But finally, everything seems to be coming to a head. The contract for the NextGen website is moving forward; the GAO has denied every servicer and PCA protest over the past year; and in the past month, a suit from two loan servicers has been settled, and the PCAs lost a major court battle. Now, the path seems clearer than ever for NextGen to move forward, though many roadblocks could crop up over the next year, including political posturing to claim credit for the system and additional protests from industry.

The timeline that follows notes many of the major landmarks in the path to a new repayment system. Though NextGen is not a done deal, the pressure is on to get contracts awarded and work started on the back end of the system. Should the plan be stopped for legal or political reasons, it will throw a wrench in all of the progress that has led to this point. The clock will not only restart, but due to time constraints on the current contracts, any hope for a new repayment system could be dashed, locking in the current system for another decade. Borrowers and taxpayers can’t afford that. With 1 million borrowers defaulting every year, a big change needs to happen now.

Education Department Erects New Barriers to Relief for Students Harmed by School Fraud and Closures; Protects For-Profit College Industry at Expense of Students

(Courtesy of National Consumer Law Center)

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) announced new rules that will make it much harder for students who are harmed by illegal school conduct or closures to get relief from their federal student loans or to hold schools accountable for illegal conduct. The rules strip away protections put in place in 2016 under the Obama administration to rein in predatory for-profit school misconduct and protect students and taxpayers from the costs of such misconduct and introduces new barriers to student loan relief.

“This rollback by the Department will encourage schools to break the law, engage in risky practices that lead to abrupt closures, and harm students with impunity,” said National Consumer Law Center attorney Abby Shafroth. “There will be more students harmed by schools attempting to boost enrollment through deceptive marketing and misrepresentations, and more schools closing before students can graduate. And those students will be much less likely to get relief from their student loans. Today’s action by the Department will result in a high risk of default on student loans and lifelong financial instability for the students.”

The new rules severely restrict access to “borrower defense” loan relief for students cheated by predatory schools that used illegal enrollment tactics. Among the new obstacles standing between scammed student borrowers and relief are provisions that prevent borrowers from having their applications for relief considered if they found out about the process or the basis for relief too late, and provisions eliminating the process for providing relief to groups of students who were subject to widespread misconduct or fraud. These two changes would significantly reduce the number of borrowers even considered for relief. For those who are considered, the application process would be daunting, requiring student borrowers navigate a complex bureaucratic process and prove demanding facts that will make relief inaccessible to many borrowers harmed by school misconduct.

The rules also jettison protections against forced arbitration, allowing schools to insulate themselves from lawsuits and evade accountability for and detection of fraud. Students will likely lose their right to bring claims against their schools to an impartial jury or judge, and to hold the school directly accountable for illegal conduct.

Finally, despite recent widespread for-profit school closures—including Education Corporation of America, Vatterott Educational Centers, and Dream Center Education Holdings—that have left tens of thousands of students with huge debts and no degree, the Department’s new rules end the promise of student loan relief for students whose schools close before they graduate. The rules axe a provision that provided automatic discharges to eligible students, and instead requires each student to navigate a bureaucratic application process.

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos characterized the Obama-era borrower defense rules that these rules are to replace as making it too easy for student loan borrowers to get relief. The Department has effectively stopped processing borrower defense applications, with no applications approved or denied in the past year. There are over 170,000 pending applications with many borrowers held in limbo for years. The new rules reflect an ongoing shift to protect the multi-billion dollar for-profit education industry at the expense of students and taxpayers, and come amid concerns about conflicts of interest raised about the role of former for-profit school executives hired by the Department.

Most provisions of the new rules are scheduled to go into effect July 1, 2020, though legal challenges are likely before then. Shafroth notes that the rules suffer from a number of legal infirmities: “The Department has reversed rules finalized only three years ago without considering the value of those rules or assessing whether the rules were working to hold institutions accountable for misconduct and abrupt closures that cost students dearly. The Department also failed to engage in meaningful stakeholder participation and public notice and comment after the 2016 rules went into effect following the close of the notice and comment period, changing the regulatory baseline. The Department can change rules but cannot do so arbitrarily or without opportunity for public comment, and these rules will be challenged in court.”

Shafroth, a staff attorney for the National Consumer Law Center’s Student Loan Borrower Assistance Project, participated as a representative for legal-aid organizations in rulemaking meetings held by the Department of Education in Washington, D.C in winter 2017 through spring 2018. Shafroth and other representatives for students, veterans, and low-income borrowers made numerous suggestions to the Department to ensure that the rules would provide student borrowers reasonable access to relief, but those suggestions were ignored and not included in the rules released today.

Congress

House Approves Short-Term Spending Bill That Would Stave Off Shutdown

(Courtesy of the New York Times)

The House on Thursday approved a short-term spending bill that would stave off a government shutdown until just before Thanksgiving, allowing lawmakers additional time to resolve disputes over annual spending legislation without a funding lapse.

The spending bill would extend funding through Nov. 21 not only for all federal government departments and agencies, but also for a number of health care and community programs, including the National Flood Insurance Program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

But its success in the House, by a 301-to-123 vote, is only a temporary salve to the bitter feuds that are standing in the way of a broader agreement over federal spending for next year. The Senate, in the midst of drafting and debating its own yearlong funding bills, has struggled to break through partisan spats over spending on President Trump's promised wall at the southwestern border.

The bill passed on Thursday, said Representative Nita M. Lowey, Democrat of New York and the chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee, "will provide families, businesses and communities with budget certainty while we negotiate long-term funding."

The Senate is expected to pass the measure before funding lapses on Oct. 1, giving senators an additional two months — until just before Congress takes a weeklong Thanksgiving break — to pass a dozen spending bills, reconcile them with the House's legislation and secure the president's signature.

While congressional leaders and the White House reached agreement in July over nearly $1.4 trillion for defense and domestic programs, 12 annual bills are necessary to outline how that money will be divided among agencies, programs and departments. The House this year passed 10 of those bills, but at different funding levels than in the budget agreement.

But those bills cannot be reconciled until the Senate passes its own versions.

Senate Democrats have raised objections to how the Republican majority set funding levels for some of the bills, and provisions that would allow for more money to be set aside for barriers and fencing. Backed by their House counterparts, they have also objected to the administration's demand that Congress replace $3.6 billion that was diverted from military construction projects to wall construction.

"We do not support diverting taxpayer dollars to build an ineffective and controversial wall along our southern border," a group of Senate Democrats wrote in a letter this week, urging for a more bipartisan process. "Especially when those funds are stolen from our military and important investments for American families, such as college affordability, and our fight against the opioid crisis."

Republicans, for their part, have pushed back on some amendments that they say are "poison pills," legislative jargon for partisan provisions that could imperil the legislation on the Senate floor. And they have accused Democrats of violating the terms of the budget agreement, which barred such policy riders.

"Our Democratic friends turned on a dime, reneged on the bipartisan agreement, and began demanding exactly the kinds of new poison pills and partisan policy changes that we all promised to omit," said Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader. "It's not about the money. It's not about compromising and getting to 'yes.' It's about not wanting to take 'yes' for an answer."

The gridlock over the measures funding the military, military construction and labor and health programs led to the failure of a procedural vote on Wednesday that would have allowed the Senate to vote on some of the legislation.

Still haunted by the 35-day government shutdown that ended earlier this year, lawmakers are eager to avoid another funding lapse. But the acrimony is such that some lawmakers have already begun to raise the prospect of a full-year stopgap spending bill if agreement cannot be found.

"That's what you might wind up with if we don't get past a standoff," Senator Richard C. Shelby, Republican of Alabama and the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, told reporters on Wednesday. "I think we're talking to each other, but I don't know if either one's listening."

Some of the bills, including the measures that would fund energy, agriculture, housing and transportation agencies and departments, among others, have advanced out of the Senate Appropriations Committee on unanimous votes of support, giving lawmakers optimism that at least some of the must-pass legislation will reach the president's desk.

Mr. McConnell on Thursday also endorsed a $250 million grant in one of those bills that would help states fortify their election systems, calling it "exactly the kind of positive outcome that is possible when we stop posturing for the press."

The stopgap legislation approved on Thursday would also replenish a program under the Commodity Credit Corporation, which has been providing aid to farmers affected by Mr. Trump's trade war. But Democrats successfully included language requiring Sonny Perdue, the agriculture secretary, to submit an itemized list of payments made by the program and projections for future payments by next year.

Lamar Alexander Blocks Vote on Funding for Minority-Serving Colleges

(Courtesy of the Washington Post)

With weeks left before $255 million in federal funding for minority-serving colleges and universities expires, Sen. Doug Jones (D-Ala.) took to the Senate floor Thursday to request unanimous consent for legislation extending the money.

Senate Education Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) objected, shutting down the vote but offering to address the funding in a broader package on higher education.

"Ensuring that historically black colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions continue to receive federal funding is something that we all want to do," Alexander said on the floor Thursday. "However, instead of a short-term patch, we should pass a long-term solution that will provide certainty to college presidents and their students. I am ready to do this, in conjunction with a few additional bipartisan higher education proposals."

Alexander's move has caused consternation among advocates for historically black colleges and other minority-serving institutions, who accuse him of using the schools as leverage for his agenda. They say that time is running out, with little chance that Republicans and Democrats will agree on reforms by the end of the month.

“While we appreciate the proposal for a longer-term or permanent solution ... recent congressional history suggests that such a proposal would not receive the requisite approval by both houses of Congress before the deadline,” said Harry L. Williams, the president of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, which supports historically black public colleges.

Alexander said many of the proposals in his package already enjoy bipartisan support, including reducing the number of questions on the federal financial aid application and giving prison inmates access to federal grant aid.

Williams and congressional Democrats say it is imperative that the Senate take action on the bill — dubbed the FUTURE Act — that Jones and Sen. Tim Scott (R-S.C.) introduced. The legislation would pay for a two-year extension of the funding by eliminating a subsidy for guaranty agencies that insure some federal student loans.

This week, the House approved its version of the bipartisan bill, sponsored by Reps. Alma Adams (D-N.C.) and Mark Walker (R-N.C.), on a voice vote. Senate Republicans showed no interest in taking up the bill. At the time, Alexander said he would prefer a long-term solution to be reached through the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the federal law governing the sector.

The proposals Alexander announced Thursday are already being discussed as a part of the reauthorization process, which could complicate matters and stymie a deal to save the funding.

New Senate Proposal Fails to Address Key Issues in Higher Education

(Courtesy of the Center for American Progress)

U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN) announced a piecemeal plan to reform the Higher Education Act. Ben Miller, vice president for Postsecondary Education at the Center for American Progress, released the following statement responding to the proposal:

Chairman Alexander’s proposal fails to address the greatest challenges confronting America’s higher education system—from meager state funding and insufficient accountability to a loan repayment system that is failing 43 million borrowers carrying $1.5 trillion in debt. While it includes some good measures such as a simplified financial aid application process, second-chance Pell, and funding for minority-serving institutions (MSIs), the plan falls short of the big changes necessary. It’s past time for Congress to tackle the big challenges head-on by passing a state-federal partnership, enhanced accountability measures, improved access to data, and greater protections for student loan borrowers.

The Senate should pass the bipartisan Future Act to ensure MSIs and HBCUs do not lose funds at the end of the month and then work toward a more comprehensive solution.

Scaled-Back HEA Plan Coming Soon?

(Courtesy of Inside Higher Ed)

GOP senator Lamar Alexander is expected to introduce legislation soon that would offer a path to piecemeal reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, after months of stalled talks over a bipartisan overhaul of the landmark law, which wasn't expected to move until at least next year.

Alexander, the chairman of the Senate education committee, has said he wants to pass an update to the HEA before he retires after next year. He’s particularly eager to simplify the application for federal student aid known as the FAFSA and the myriad repayment options for student borrowers.

A scaled-back package of higher education bills -- which could be attached to a funding bill for historically black colleges that Congress is under pressure to pass by Sept. 30 -- could include a streamlined FAFSA application, the College Transparency Act, expanded Pell Grants for incarcerated students and the broadening of Pell eligibility to short-term programs, according to a wide range of individuals with knowledge of the discussions. Alexander's office didn't respond to questions about plans to introduce a broader HEA proposal.

But Senator Patty Murray, the Washington Democrat and ranking member on the committee, has repeatedly said she’s not interested in passing legislation that falls short of a comprehensive reauthorization of the higher ed law. And discussions between Republicans and Democrats have hit numerous hurdles over issues like college affordability, oversight of for-profit colleges and campus sexual misconduct.

That a smaller bill is in the works -- rumors were circulating around Washington that it could be released as early as this week, a timeline refuted by Alexander’s staff -- suggests the Tennessee Republican is tired of waiting for a deal with Democrats as his time runs out in Congress.

The proposal also would include a 10-year extension of Title III, Part F, funding for historically black colleges and other minority-serving institutions, which is set to expire at the end of the month. That element of the proposal would be significant, because the House just passed a two-year extension of the $255 million in annual funding as part of stand-alone legislation called the FUTURE Act.

“Chairman Alexander is working on a permanent solution to continue mandatory funding for historically black colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions," said an Alexander spokesman. "He has been clear that his goal is to pass a higher education reauthorization this year and looks forward to working with his colleagues to pass a bill into law.”

After the House of Representatives passed the FUTURE Act on Tuesday, HBCU leaders called for the Senate to quickly pass identical legislation introduced by Senator Tim Scott, a South Carolina Republican, and Senator Doug Jones, an Alabama Democrat.

“This critical funding stream helps eligible colleges and universities enhance their fiscal stability, improve their institutional management and strengthen their academic programming, with a particular focus on high-demand career areas, like careers in STEM fields,” Harry L. Williams, president and CEO of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, said in a statement Tuesday.

The Senate now should “follow the House’s lead and take swift action to prevent this critical funding from [lapsing] at month’s end, by voting to pass the FUTURE Act," he said.

Jones said in a statement that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell should bring the bill up for a vote and “take the next step to give these schools the certainty they need to continue serving their students and fulfill their mission.”

An alternative proposal from Alexander that attaches that funding to broader higher ed legislation could complicate efforts to renew the funding by Sept. 30. Some sources who are plugged in to the discussions of the proposal said having HBCU funds tied to an HEA bill may put pressure on Democrats to back it, but that a debate would likely take lawmakers past the funding deadline.

The items discussed as part of a scaled-back HEA update reflect priorities with at least some bipartisan support. Alexander is famous for using a printed copy of the FAFSA to illustrate the application’s complexity during his congressional hearings or speeches. But student aid advocates and Democrats also want to make it easier for students to apply for federal grants and loans.

Democrats have introduced bills to overturn the 1994 ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated students in multiple congressional sessions. But this year they secured their first GOP co-sponsors. And the push to reinstate Pell Grants in prisons has gotten extra momentum from the

Second Chance Pell pilot program and from the Trump administration, which has shown an interest in criminal justice reform and has backed reinstating Pell Grants for some incarcerated students.

There is also bipartisan energy behind repealing a ban on a federal student-level data system, thanks in part to demands from both Democratic and GOP lawmakers for more information on college outcomes. The College Transparency Act, which would remove the ban, has support from more than a quarter of Senate lawmakers.

Legislation to make higher ed programs as short as eight weeks eligible for Pell Grants has support from community college associations and business groups in Washington, although some consumer advocates and scholars have questioned the value of some short-term credentials and whether there will be substantial demand for such programs.

If Alexander moves forward with the plans for a scaled-back HEA bill, he's likely to get a chilly response from Democratic lawmakers. Both Murray and Representative Bobby Scott, the Democratic chairman of the House education committee, have said they're committed to a comprehensive update to the Higher Education Act.

Senate Education Spending Bill Would Increase Aid for School Safety, Charters

(Courtesy of Politico)

The Senate's bill to the fund the U.S. Department of Education would keep overall spending virtually flat, although grants for charter schools would get a relatively small increase, as would programs intended to improve school safety.

The legislation to fund the Education Department would provide $71.4 billion in discretionary funding to the agency for fiscal 2020, which starts Oct. 1. Another winner in the bill is the Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant program—officially known as Title IV Part A in the Every Student Succeeds Act—intended to provide more well-rounded school experiences to students. The Senate bill would provide a $50 million boost to these grants, bringing total funding to just over $1.2 billion.

However, one relatively small program popular among Democrats would lose out; see more on that below.

Given how different the Senate bill is from the education funding legislation passed by the Democratically-controlled House earlier this year, it's fair to expect a significant amount of political wrangling before Congress finally reaches a deal on how much Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos will have to spend next year. Just to name one example, the House legislation seeks to cut charter school aid by nearly 10 percent.

However, it's also important to note that most, if not all, of the major fights over the bill might not focus on education at all, since the legislation also funds the Health and Human Services and Labor Departments; Democrats and Republicans have big disagreements over HHS in particular.

In fact, although the fiscal year starts in roughly two weeks, it may be much longer than that before such a deal is reached, while Congress passes several short-term spending bills to keep the government open.

The GOP Senate bill also ignores several dramatic cuts to the department proposed by the Trump administration in its fiscal 2020 budget blueprint. It marks the third year running that Republican senators have ignored the calls for big education cuts from President Donald Trump and DeVos.

Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., the chairman of the Senate subcommittee overseeing education spending, said in a Tuesday statement that the bill "maintains funding for core elementary and secondary education formula grants." In practical terms, that means funding for Title I funding for disadvantaged students ($15.9 billion), state special education grants ($12.4 billion), and funding for career and technical education programs ($1.3 billion) remain level in the Senate legislation.

A scheduled hearing on the legislation was nixed earlier this month. And it's possible the Senate will vote on the legislation without giving it a formal committee or subcommittee hearing.

- The federal Charter School Grant program gets $460 million in the Senate legislation, a $20 million increase from current spending. Specifically, the legislation calls for $7.5 million in aid to expand charters in rural areas.
- The School Safety National Activities gets a $10 million boost, up to $105 million, in order to prevent violence and improve school climates.
- Another winner is Impact Aid, which provides money for school impacted by federal activities such as military installations, which would get a $25 million boost up to around $1.5 billion.

One loser in the Senate bill? The grants for Full-Service Community Schools, which aim to provide expanded educational opportunities and a variety of wraparound health and social services. While House Democrats want $40 million for community schools, a $22 million increase over current spending, the Senate bill would eliminate funding. Trump's budget would also eliminate federal aid to community schools.

One more thing: Remember all the drama around Special Olympics funding earlier this year? The Senate bill would boost aid to the program by $2.5 million, bringing total aid to just over $20 million in fiscal 2020. You shouldn't be all that surprised: Tim Shriver, the chairman of the Special Olympics, has called Blunt the program's "biggest ally in Congress."

Reps. Shalala, Pressley, and Tlaib introduce the Protecting Student Aid Act of 2019

(Courtesy of Carlos Condarco, Office of Congresswoman Donna Shalala)

Reps. Donna Shalala (FL-27), Ayanna Pressley (MA-7), and Rashida Tlaib (MI-13) recently introduced the *Protecting Student Aid Act of 2019 (PSA Act),* legislation designed to reinvigorate the Student Aid Enforcement Unit within the U.S. Department of Education in order to allow the Department to better respond to fraud and abuse within federal student aid programs.

"There are more than 12 million students in this country who rely on federal student aid," said Rep. Shalala. "Under President Obama, the Department of Education created the Student Aid Enforcement Unit to protect federal student aid from wrongdoing at the close to 7,000 institutions who participate in these programs by hiring scores of lawyers and investigators to protect students from being swindled."

Rep. Shalala continued, "However, since assuming office, Betsy DeVos and the Trump administration have dramatically cut the resources available at the Student Aid Enforcement Unit. The PSA Act would revitalize this important unit and make sure that we can continue holding colleges accountable for misleading and defrauding students."

"For too long, Secretary DeVos and the Department of Education have allowed the fraud and deception of the for-profit college industry to run rampant," said Congresswoman Pressley. "This industry has preyed on vulnerable communities leaving students with crushing levels of student debt and low-quality degrees. The PSA Act will strengthen the Federal Student Aid unit to ensure that students are protected, and institutions found cheating students and taxpayers are held accountable."

"The Department of Education should be vigorously defending students from predatory and deceptive behavior by higher education institutions, but Betsy DeVos has completely failed to hold institutions that defraud and mislead Americans accountable. The *PSA Act* will recommit the Department of Education to protecting students and ensuring the credibility of our higher education system," said Rep. Tlaib.

The Protecting Student Aid Act of 2019 would codify the Student Aid Enforcement Unit and equip the Department of Education with the tools to protect students from fraud and abuse. Specifically, the bill would ensure proper identification of potential misconduct at Institutions of Higher Education, provide expert legal analysis, support, and advice on borrower defense claims, and prioritize state and federal partnerships in holding bad actors accountable. To review the bill summary click here.

Other News

CIAW Recognizes National Workforce Development Month with Senate Briefing: "Investing in America's Workforce: A National Imperative"

NAPE's Senior Policy Advisor, Lisa R. Ransom joined coalition partners with the Campaign to Invest in America's Workforce (CIAW) and honorary congressional host Senator Diane Feinstein (D-CA) for recognizing National Workforce Development Month by hosting a Senate congressional briefing this morning on "Investing in America's Workforce: A National Imperative." The briefing, moderated by Katie Spiker, Director of Government Affairs for the National Skills Coalition, featured panelists included:

- Harry J. Holzer, Professor of Public Policy at Georgetown University, fellow at Brookings, and a former Chief Economist of the US Department of Labor
- Lindsey P. Horvath, Mayor Pro Tempore, West Hollywood, CA
- Jason Perkins-Cohen, Director, Workforce Development Board for Baltimore City
- Grant Shmelzer, Executive Director, IEC Chesapeake

NAPE is pleased to be a member of CIAW and to support initiatives that support closing the skills gap for our nation's workforce. For more information on CIAW's workforce platform, click here.

Senate briefing panel moderated by Katie Spiker, Director, Government Affairs for NSC

Honorable Lindsey Horvath with NAPE Senior Policy Advisor, Lisa R. Ransom

September Reading

The Hunt Institute: Attainment for All: Postsecondary Pathways - The Early College High School Model

National Skills Coalition: The Roadmap for Racial Equity: An Imperative for Workforce Adovcates

Southern Regional Education Board (SREB): SREB 2019 Factbook on Higher Education

Institute for Women's Policy Research Briefing Paper: Women of Color in Economics and Sociology Report More Unequal Treatment and Harassment than Men of Color