

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

December 15, 2017

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chair
Committee on Education & The Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Foxx:

As strong supporters of the Federal TRIO Programs, we write to express our concern regarding certain TRIO provisions in the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act. It is evident from the language included in this bill that you and your staff worked to craft a thoughtful and deliberate piece of legislation intended to enrich the TRIO chapter of the Higher Education Act. Although there are many welcome modifications, the PROSPER Act includes a number of other provisions that we would like to work with you on and provide input which we believe improves the legislation. We very much hope that you will take the concerns outlined below into consideration.

The first issue relates to two provisions within the PROSPER Act that grant the Secretary of Education total discretion to eliminate the current structure of the Federal TRIO Programs. These are the provisions to “reserve not less than 10 percent of...available amount[s] to award grants or contracts to applicants who have not previously received a grant or contract under this chapter” as well as the reservation of “not less than 10 percent of [amounts appropriated under 402A(g)]” to fund the IMPACT Grants contemplated in the newly created Section 402I. By issuing such broad authority to the Administration, this language may undermine Congressional intent—particularly of the appropriators—and negates the accountability measures built into the law to ensure high quality service delivery to our nation’s neediest students.

Another provision within the PROSPER Act that raises concerns is the creation of a 20% matching requirement for TRIO applicants. It is quite understandable to expect institutions to demonstrate a shared interest in the success of the students they serve; in fact, many institutions contribute cost-sharing to the TRIO programs they host. However, a great many more institutions in our Districts simply do not have the resources to meet this proposed requirement.

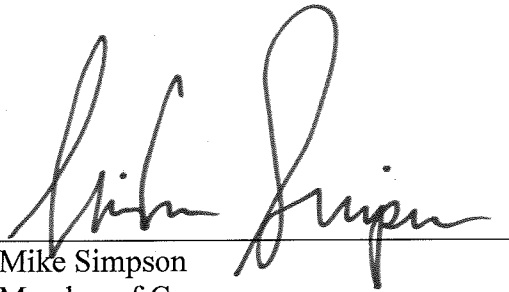
A third issue is a clause that would prove harmful to many institutions and, perhaps inadvertently, serve as a disincentive to increasing institutionally-based college access and support programs. More specifically, we are referring to the provision that would allow the Secretary to limit an institution’s ability to receive funds for TRIO if it sponsored a similar program unless that program served a different population or a different campus. We believe this provision runs counter to your

intent to make sure that institutions “put skin in the game” and take responsibility by investing in federal programs on their campuses.

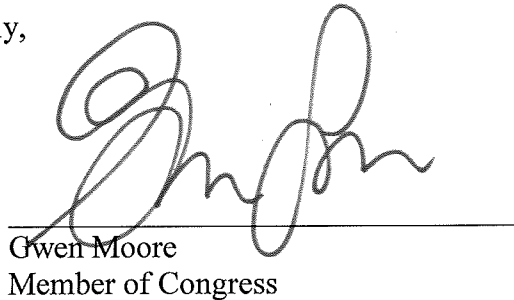
A final issue for your consideration is the creation of additional eligibility criteria for the Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) programs. Under current law, only two-thirds of program participants must meet eligibility criteria of being both low-income and first-generation. The remaining one-third of participants need not fit any particular criteria. Currently EOC and Talent Search programs document that approximately 95% of their participants meet at least one of these criteria. We ask that you make an allowance to assure that programs are not put in jeopardy if a small number of students or clients are not able to provide documentation of their low-income or first-generation status.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our input on the PROSPER Act. Your consideration is greatly appreciated at this stage in the legislative process and we hope that you will consider these concerns. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the TRIO Caucus Co-Chairs or their staff (Rep. Mike Simpson [R-ID], Katherine Myers; Rep. Gwen Moore [D-WI], Izmir Aitch) with any questions. We welcome the opportunity to work with you to ensure the success of higher education reforms that benefit students.

Sincerely,



Mike Simpson
Member of Congress



Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



Tom Cole
Chairman
Labor, HHS, & Education Appropriations
Subcommittee



Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
Labor, HHS, & Education Appropriations
Subcommittee