



Opening Statement

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR

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The Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott • Chairman

Opening Statement of Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)
Full Committee Hearing in the House Committee on Education and Labor
Innovation to Improve Equity: Exploring High-Quality Pathways to a College Degree
2175 Rayburn House Office Building
Wednesday, June 19, 2019 at 10:15 a.m.

Today, the Committee will hold its fifth and final bipartisan hearing on the *Higher Education Act* to discuss the role of innovation in improving student outcomes and advancing equity. I would like to thank Dr. Foxx and her staff for their partnership during this entire process.

Throughout our hearings, we have established Congress's responsibility to restore the intent of the HEA and provide all Americans, no matter their background, with a quality college education that prepares them for the modern workforce.

More than 95 percent of jobs created since the recession went to workers with at least some college education, and we expect the growing demand for skilled workers to continue for years to come.

Our higher education system must give every student the opportunity to be on the right side of this trend. But, this is not the case today.

State disinvestment in higher education has forced students and families to shoulder more of the cost of college. Declining state funding accounts for well over a third of the rise in tuition costs since 2008. This trend has also left institutions serving our most vulnerable students—including community colleges, HBCUs, and Tribal Colleges and Universities—to try to do more with less.

Simultaneously, federal investments in student financial aid have failed to keep up. In 1980, the maximum Pell Grant covered three-quarters of the cost of attendance at a public four-year college. Today, the maximum Pell Grant covers less than 30 percent of the cost of attendance at public four-year colleges.

Because of the rising cost of college and weakening power of Pell Grants, too many low-income students either cannot afford to enroll in postsecondary education or cannot afford to complete their programs. Pell Grant recipients are 18 percentage points less likely to graduate than non-Pell recipients.

Students of color also suffer disproportionately lower graduation rates. White students also complete college degrees at more one-and-a-half times the rate of Black students.

In short, those who benefit the most from completing college are the least likely to do so. To address this trend, we need structural reforms in our higher education system that not only lower the cost of college, but also better serve today's diverse students.

Innovation, backed by rigorous evaluation, plays a key role in this reform. Today, we'll hear about institutions pioneering strategies that empower students to access and complete college programs that fit their needs. Our

witnesses, including my fellow Virginian Tomikia LeGrande of Virginia Commonwealth University, will share their experiences with new approaches that help achieve the goals of quality and equity.

For example, investing in wraparound support for students – including career counseling, financial assistance, and employment support – has proven to help students complete their programs on time. When we identify such successful innovations, our role as federal policymakers is to support and expand them.

College in high school programs, known as “dual enrollment,” help students to gain college credit while still in high school and can help reduce the cost of a degree. Research shows that these benefits are particularly important for underserved students who may be discouraged from enrolling in college because they believe they cannot afford it, or just don’t see themselves as college students. Yet, dual enrollment programs continue to be accessible to primarily affluent students compared to low-income students and students of color.

Similarly, we must ensure that programs offering learning beyond the traditional classroom provide students with the flexibility to learn at their own pace. Programs like online courses and competency-based education can provide an opportunity to drive down the cost of college and accelerate learning, but research is clear that these outcomes are not evenly experienced by today’s students. We must be careful to only promote and expand policies that we know, based on the evidence, will benefit all students.

Congress has a responsibility to explore innovative strategies that provide more students the support they need to complete college and reach their full potential. But as we pursue new pathways for students to earn a quality degree, we cannot sacrifice our commitment to quality and equity.

Today’s hearing will help us balance these compelling interests.

I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today for this important discussion. I now yield to the Ranking Member, Dr. Foxx, for an opening statement.