



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)

House Committee on Education and Labor Full Committee Markup

H.R. 4674 – The College Affordability Act

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Tuesday, October 29, 2019 | 10:15am

Today, we are here to markup H.R. 4674, the *College Affordability Act*, a comprehensive reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* that will:

- Lower the cost of college;
- Improve the quality of higher education; and,
- Expand opportunity for students of all backgrounds to succeed.

This legislation is the result of an extensive and transparent process that was guided by evidence and research, as well as input from stakeholders from across the higher education system.

This Committee held five bipartisan hearings to discuss the critical challenges across affordability, accountability, and completion. And while we could not come to an agreement on a bipartisan bill, we kept our Republican colleagues engaged and informed through every stage of the process.

Republican staff received copies of this legislation more than a month before its introduction and Committee staff from both sides of the aisle met several times to review the bill. The *College Affordability Act* includes more than 30 bipartisan proposals to ensure it represents voices from across the country. As I said on the outset, we will continue to work in good faith with our Republican colleagues to find and build on areas of agreement.

When President Lyndon Johnson signed the *Higher Education Act* into law in 1965, he stated that it meant that “*a high school senior anywhere in this great land of ours, can apply to any college or any university, in any of the 50 states, and not be turned away because [his or her] family is poor.*”

That landmark legislation firmly established the federal role in working with states to promote the accessibility, affordability, and eventual attainment of a college education.

Unfortunately, more than 50 years after the HEA’s original passage – the promise of an affordable college education is out of reach for many Americans.

A quality, college degree remains the surest path to financial security and a rewarding career. Our country is increasingly requiring workers to have more than a high school education, so the value of a quality degree will only continue to grow.

Accordingly, we must fulfill the promise of making higher education affordable for all students.

The *College Affordability Act* fulfills that promise of higher education and ensures that all Americans have a fair shot in the modern economy in three ways.

First, it **cuts the cost of college** for students and families and lowers the cost of loans for future and existing borrowers.

The *College Affordability Act* restores state and federal investments in public colleges and universities and will reduce the burden that has gradually shifted over the years to students and families. It also increases the value of the Pell Grant so that more students will not have to borrow any money for college and those that do will borrow less.

For those who do take out student loans, those loans will be cheaper to take out, simpler to understand, and easier to payoff.

The bill also helps existing borrowers reduce their monthly and total payments, and both improves and expands the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

Second, the proposal **improves the quality of higher education** by holding schools accountable for their students' success.

The *College Affordability Act* cracks down on schools that defraud students, veterans, and taxpayers by holding all schools accountable for their students' success.

Under this bill, schools that are responsible for a disproportionate share of student loan defaults, and schools that spend too much on marketing and lobbying while spending too little on educating students will no longer have access to taxpayer money.

The bill also restores two key consumer protections that have been rolled back by the current administration. These are the Borrowers Defense rule, which helps defrauded borrowers get back on their feet, and the Gainful Employment rule, which holds career programs accountable to the promises they make to students.

The third and final piece of this proposal **expands opportunity for students of all backgrounds to succeed in college** by providing students more flexible options and stronger support.

The *College Affordability Act* makes Pell Grants available for high-quality, short-term programs where students can quickly build competitive skills in high-demand jobs.

It invests in stronger wraparound services to keep students on-track for graduation, including campus-based childcare and small grants to cover students' financial emergencies.

Finally, we provide record levels of support for community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and other Minority Serving Institutions that disproportionately enroll underserved students.

In sum, the *College Affordability Act* is a comprehensive bill that will immediately improve the lives of students and families while putting a **down payment** on investments that we need to make in the future.

I urge all of my colleagues to support the *College Affordability Act*, and I yield the Ranking Member, Dr. Foxx.