

# STATEMENT ON HIGHER EDUCATION ACT LEGISLATION

Contact: David Conner  
202.775.4454  
[dconner@acct.org](mailto:dconner@acct.org)

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## **Comprehensive Higher Education Bill Would Greatly Benefit Community College Students if Enacted**

WASHINGTON, DC—Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, released the Higher Education Affordability Act of 2014 today—the first formal legislation to be introduced in either chamber of Congress as part of the latest process of reauthorizing the Higher Education Act of 1965. The HEA was last reauthorized in 2008 and touches nearly every aspect of federal higher education policy.

The Higher Education Affordability Act of 2014 (HEAA) makes a number of proposed changes to existing statute that would improve the ability of community colleges to fulfill their open-access mission and to provide excellent educational value to students and their families. The HEAA does this by restoring federal student aid resources like the year-round Pell Grant and limited ability-to-benefit eligibility (ATB), simplifying the way students navigate and choose higher education options, improving the measurement of student outcomes, augmenting consumer and borrower protections, and streamlining the complex task of student loan repayment.

“This bill is an excellent step in the right direction and an important marker of many community college priorities for reauthorization,” said ACCT President and CEO **J. Noah Brown**. “We look forward to working with the new Congress to prioritize higher education funding and make urgent reforms where legislative compromise can be achieved.”

ACCT applauds two additions from the HEAA discussion draft that would immensely benefit community colleges and are critical piece of any reauthorization. First, the HEAA would reestablish the year-round Pell Grant for part- and full-time students alike. “All students deserve the opportunity to attend college year-round and without delay,” said **Brown**. “Federal student aid must become more accessible for a broader array of students who look to sustain their educational progress.”

Second, the bill would establish a federal student unit record system, which would vastly improve available information on the academic pathways, completion rates, transfer rates, and earnings of students. The bill includes significant privacy protections that prevent the disclosure of any personally-identifiable information. ACCT strongly supports program-level outcome information that can help students, their families, and policymakers gain meaningful perspectives on the potential benefits of pursuing postsecondary education, including the low-cost options available at community colleges.

Among other notable provisions in the extensive reauthorization proposal: restoring Title IV eligibility to ATB students enrolled in career pathway programs, allowing the use of prior-prior year income information on the FAFSA, consolidating income-based repayment options, establishing new state-federal college affordability partnerships, expanding dual enrollment and early college programs, and authorizing a new community college and industry partnership program.

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### **About ACCT**

The Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) is a non-profit educational organization of governing boards, representing more than 6,500 elected and appointed trustees who govern over 1,100 community, technical, and junior colleges in the United States and beyond. For more information, go to [www.acct.org](http://www.acct.org). Follow ACCT on Twitter [@CCTrustees](https://twitter.com/CCTrustees).