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March 12, 2019

Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the three million members of the National Education Association and the 50 million students they serve, we would like to submit for the record the following comments in connection with today's hearing, "Reauthorizing the Higher Education Act: Simplifying the FAFSA and Reducing the Burden of Verification." As Congress begins holding hearings and gathering information in preparation for reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, our top priorities are:

#### **Making college more affordable**

In studies published in January 2019, the [Federal Reserve](#) blamed rising student debt for two troubling shifts in the U.S. economy: declining homeownership among young Americans and college graduates leaving rural areas in droves. To address these issues, we support:

- Preserving Public Service Loan Forgiveness to encourage college graduates to pursue careers in education, firefighting, law enforcement, and other forms of public service
- Creating a pathway to a postsecondary degree by eliminating community college tuition
- Allowing federal student loans to be refinanced when interest rates decline
- Streamlining repayment plans to create a single, affordable income-based option
- Restoring federally subsidized loans for graduate students
- Permitting private student loans to be discharged in bankruptcy

#### **Broadening access to higher education**

The independent [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#) reports that in the 2017-18 school year, states invested \$7 billion less in public colleges and universities than they did in 2008 (after adjusting for inflation). To address this issue, we support:

- Encouraging states to invest in higher education instead of shifting costs to students and families
- Increasing opportunities for students to earn college credits while still in high school
- Increasing support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions

#### **Ensuring teachers are profession-ready the first day they enter the classroom**

To address this issue, we support:

- Encouraging comprehensive residencies that go beyond traditional student teaching
- Requiring teacher candidates to demonstrate that they have the skills and knowledge necessary for effective practice — for example, by completing a classroom-based performance assessment
- Making a significant effort to recruit and retain educators, especially educators of color

### **Improving faculty working conditions**

More than 75 percent of the instructional workforce in U.S. colleges and universities are adjunct or “contingent” faculty. Generally, they earn about \$25,000 a year and are not eligible for unemployment compensation, Public Service Loan Forgiveness, health benefits or retirement benefits — near-impossible working conditions that hurt students as well. Many adjuncts don’t have offices on their campuses, office hours for students, or time to write recommendations because they spend so much time traveling from job to job. To address these issues, we support:

- Restoring the focus on the core mission of higher education: teaching students
- Providing incentives to reinvest in a predominantly full-time, tenure-track faculty
- Making adjuncts eligible for Public Service Loan Forgiveness and unemployment compensation between academic terms

We thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments and stand ready to work with you to help attain these goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marc Egan  
Director of Government Relations  
National Education Association