



January 26, 2026

The Honorable Mike Lawler
U.S. House of Representatives
324 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20003

**Subject: AICCU Support--H.R. 6718: Professional Student Degree Act
House Education and Workforce Committee**

Dear Representative Lawler:

On behalf of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU), I write to express our support for H.R. 6718, the Professional Student Degree Act. Thank you for authoring this important legislation to expand and update the federal definition of a “professional degree” and better reflect today’s workforce needs.

AICCU is the organizational voice for more than 85 nonprofit higher education institutions in California. Collectively, our member institutions enroll 187,000 undergraduate students, including 56,000 Pell recipients and 163,000 graduate students, nearly 35,000 of whom rely on Grad PLUS loans to finance their education.

The Reimagining and Improving Student Education negotiated rulemaking committee imposed a very restrictive definition of professional degrees, limiting it to just 11 programs. Under H.R. 1, only students enrolled in these programs would be eligible to borrow at the higher federal loan amounts. Your bill would codify those 11 programs in statute, expand the list to include 13 additional degree programs, and appropriately gives the Secretary of Education the authority to designate additional qualifying professional degrees as workforce demands evolve.

The broader changes to federal loans in H.R. 1—including the elimination of the Grad PLUS Loan program and the caps on graduate loans—will have serious and unintended consequences. These changes will significantly hinder access to graduate and professional education in high-need fields, particularly health care and mental health, at a time when workforce shortages are already acute. Rather than lowering the cost of education, these policies will push students toward private loans that are more expensive, less flexible, and often inaccessible to students from low-income backgrounds or those without strong credit histories. As a result, fewer students will pursue these essential professions.

H.R. 6718 is a critical and constructive step toward mitigating these impacts and preserving access to professional education that supports the nation’s workforce needs. We appreciate your leadership on this issue and look forward to working with you to advance this bill and on future efforts to and strengthen graduate and professional education pathways.

Thank you again for your leadership and partnership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristen F. Soares".

Kristen F. Soares
President