



Higher Education Spotlight Forum

"Killing the American Dream: How Republicans are Closing the Door on Working and Middle-Class Students"

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

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Senator Hirono, members of the Senate Democratic Caucus, thank you for the opportunity and invitation to submit testimony discussing the current state of higher education.

My name is Roxanne Garza, and I'm the Director of Higher Education Policy at EdTrust, a national nonprofit organization focused on closing opportunity gaps and advancing racial and economic justice in education. At EdTrust, we believe that education is not just a pathway to opportunity — it is a civil right.

The strength and stability of our economy, our democracy, and our position on the global stage is dependent on our ability to ensure that all students can access and receive a high-quality education that prepares them for the global economy. Yet for far too many students—especially students of color, students from low-income families, students learning English, and students with disabilities—these opportunities have been limited, blocked, or impeded.

We are at a critical juncture regarding the long-term future of post-secondary access and affordability for millions of current and future college students. Since January, the Trump administration, along with allies in Congress, have waged an unrelenting campaign to remake higher education, through a series of bad policies, including congressional legislation, draconian budget proposals, and executive orders. EdTrust has been at the forefront in collaborating with partners to defend the students most negatively impacted by these proposed cuts and policy changes. There are several different ongoing threats to college access and affordability we must strongly oppose, including disruptions to vital programs caused by the continued withholding of FY25 federal education funding combined with severe cuts to higher education programs contained in both the [President's](#) and [House's](#) budgets. Furthermore, new policies included within the One Big Beautiful Bill Act will increase students' debt burdens and limit educational access. Finally, the administration's extrajudicial interpretations of law and process are directly harming programs and institutions serving students of color by directly removing vital resources and chilling their ability to recruit, enroll, and support those students.

At present, there is at least [\\$410 billion dollars](#) of taxpayer funding, appropriated by a bipartisan majority of Congress and signed into law by the current president, that is being withheld with little to no guidance or transparency for grantees and the general public. Of that number, [roughly \\$2.3B are educational programs](#) that have experienced unilateral termination of existing grants, the continued withholding of FY25 funds, or both. These actions, in addition to violating the Constitution if funds are not obligated by the end of the month in some cases, are incredibly damaging to the ability of students of color, students from low-income

backgrounds, student parents, and other underserved students to access affordable pathways to high-quality higher education.

The [recent termination](#) last week of \$350 million in Title III and Title V grants for institutions serving students of color – including Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Predominantly Black Institutions, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, and more – is especially pernicious. Unilaterally repurposing those dollars for HBCUs and TCUs is contrary to Congressional intent and pits certain Title III and V institutions against the others instead of supporting all of these institutions and the students they serve.

That action follows the delayed release of Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program funds to support student-parents, the [wholesale destruction](#) of the Institute of Education Sciences, the withholding of essential funding for programs improve educational outcomes for low-income, rural, and first-generation students, including the Postsecondary Student Success Grant (PSSG) program and TRIO, and the freezing of funds to support teacher preparation.

Unpopular budget proposals in both the House of Representatives and the White House seek to make these funding freezes and cancellations permanent; they would further [gut the Department of Education](#), including continuing to fire staff, and permanently terminate funding for many of the same programs they are crippling now. The [Trump budget proposal](#) would zero out all of the programs previously mentioned, in addition to slashing the max Pell award and implementing a 15% overall cut to the federal education budget. The [House Labor-H bill](#) takes a similar approach and has proposed double-digit percentage cuts to federal education spending for the last three years. [Public polling repeatedly shows](#) that Americans want more federal spending on education programs, not less. These cuts must be rejected, and negotiations should align to the parameters set by the [bipartisan Senate Labor-H bill](#) reported out of committee earlier this summer.

In addition to these funding restrictions, the Trump administration is embarking on [rulemaking processes](#) to implement new higher education policy contained within [the reconciliation bill](#) passed this summer. Changes to student loan repayment will increase monthly payments for the majority of borrowers, placing more financial strain upon them and increasing the risk of default, especially for lower-income borrowers. Furthermore, the reconciliation bill has weakened important borrower protections that protected millions of students from predatory institutions and practices. Additionally, the new income-based repayment terms mean very few people will ever achieve loan forgiveness. The restriction on federal loan access for graduate education will result in students being forced to take out loans from private banks with more onerous terms, and some students will decline to pursue graduate education altogether. Additionally, these changes will result in fewer students moving into fields of specific national need, like various medical professions or into the classroom. We urge members to track the rulemaking process closely, submit comments, and propose legislation to reform and eliminate burdens for students created by these new policies.

Finally, the Trump administration has acted in unprecedented ways to both leverage federal research grants via an opaque taskforce operating [outside of the parameters of the adjudication process laid out in the Civil Rights Act](#) to undermine academic freedom, and to overinterpret the Supreme Court ruling [banning race-conscious college admissions](#) to dramatically [burden the recruitment](#) of [Black and Latino students](#), especially those who are [undocumented](#), into higher education. Students of color now make up [45% of student enrollment](#) in colleges and universities. [Dismantling the programs](#) and services that support their academic success and wellbeing and cutting off the path to higher education will only deepen racial and economic inequities, widen achievement gaps, and weaken the nation's workforce.

We stand in opposition to the policies of an administration that seeks to create a system that erects barriers to achievement for millions of students, particularly those most underserved. We also urge leaders to continue the work of promoting popular solutions for affordable and accessible higher education, including strengthening and expanding Pell Grants, creating a pathway to debt-free higher education via a federal-state partnership, supporting evidenced-based student support programs, and more. Amidst pushing back against bad policies harming students, it is also essential that we articulate and fight for a proactive vision that ensures all students, regardless of background, can achieve their academic goals and attain the American dream without a lifetime of crippling debt. EdTrust stands ready to partner with you on this important work.

We stand ready to fight for the future of higher education and articulate a vision where investments in access and affordability are increased, civil rights are enforced, and borrower protections are strengthened and enforced for all students.

I look forward to your questions and to working together to defend educational equity and civil rights for all. Thank you.