

**United States Senate, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Accountability and Risk to Taxpayers, January 30, 2018**

OPENING STATEMENT

**JOSÉ LUIS CRUZ, PRESIDENT
LEHMAN COLLEGE OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK**

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this morning on the critical issue of accountability in higher education.

My name is José Luis Cruz, and I am the President of Lehman College of The City University of New York, located in the proud, resilient borough of The Bronx. Our College serves approximately 13,000 undergraduate and graduate students in 90 degree programs, plus 12,000 students in certificate and workforce development programs. Fifty percent of Lehman undergraduates have a household income of \$30,000 or less; 80 percent are students of color, and 41 percent speak a language other than English at home. Lehman's students embody the aspirations of over 140 different ancestries and exhibit the drive of those who strive to build their life in the City of New York.

As the Committee moves to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA), I hope you proceed in a thoughtful, purposeful, and bipartisan way that recognizes the fundamental American values that are at stake and acknowledges that the resulting legislation will impact the America of tomorrow in ways as significant as the overhaul of the tax code, the reconceptualization of our health care system, and the redesign of our immigration system.

We are here to discuss accountability. I will premise all my comments on building upon the existing accountability structures, including the gainful employment regulation, the 90/10 rule, and the ban on incentive compensation, not eliminating them. To better serve students, the new HEA should protect them from the tyranny of low expectations, defend their right to seek to meet their full potential, provide a level playing field as they work to improve their lot in life through postsecondary education and recognize the critical role institutions play in a student's success.

We also need to remember that the higher education sector is diverse and a federal accountability system must be tailored to account for differences in institutional missions, student demographics, program objectives, and governance structures. But, for accountability to work, we need to have the courage to confront those who are currently abusing the system.

Again, we cannot forget that what schools do matters; two schools serving very similar populations can have vastly different outcomes. My former school, Cal State Fullerton, was just highlighted for having a graduation rate for Latino students that is 24 points higher than one of its peer institutions, the University of Texas San Antonio. Both are large, public, moderately selective Hispanic-serving institutions with comparable levels of Latino and low-income students. Fullerton's success was no accident. It was the result of very intentional action, and the impetus for that work was equity-focused accountability from institutional and state leaders.

The imperative to focus on equity cannot be understated. The original HEA passed in 1965, yet low-income students today are only just beginning to catch up to the rate their high-income peers enrolled in college over 40 years ago. One reason for this disparity in college-going – a factor that also manifests itself in gaps in college completion – is that to this day, we as a country continue to give students from historically underserved communities less of the things they need. We give them less funding, less access to effective, in-field experienced teachers and less access to a college or career-ready curriculum and advanced coursework.

Moreover, there's the fact that low-income students and students of color who do enroll in college are far less likely than other students to enroll in institutions where most students graduate and far more likely to enroll in the institutions, including those in the for-profit sector, that graduate few of their students and create disproportionate debt. These trends put students in a precarious position to successfully repay their student loan debt and emphasize the need to ensure colleges responsibly recruit, enroll, and graduate their students.

The good news is that designing an equity-focused accountability system is possible. Here are several recommendations.

First, equity must matter in accountability metrics. Students who aren't measured don't count. If we want institutions to pay attention to the outcomes of low-income students and students of color, we must make the same shift our country has made in K-12 to demand disaggregated outcomes data. There should be minimum standards for the enrollment of Pell students, graduation rates, and loan repayment – for all students and by race and income. We need to couple increased expectations with focused investments and provide time for campuses to improve before any sanctions attach. Senator Isakson and Senator Coons' ASPIRE Act follows this model. I appreciate your work on the issue, Senator Isakson.

Second, work to provide focused investments in building the capacity of colleges to use evidence-based innovation, particularly for the 2- and 4-year public institutions that serve the majority of America's students. You heard last week from my colleague about CUNY ASAP. Programs like that show what is possible with the right incentives and supports necessary to ensure that all students have equitable opportunities and outcomes in higher education. The average campus leader can identify several practices that can improve completion, like co-requisite remediation, guided pathways, intrusive advising, and data-informed decision making, but often lack the financial or human capital needed to implement these strategies effectively.

Finally, be unwavering in your commitment to protecting students and taxpayers from fraud and abuse. Congress must ensure that every dollar the federal government invests in higher education is used effectively, efficiently, and in the best interest of the increasingly diverse public.

An equity-focused accountability system for higher education can address this need and help improve student outcomes across the board by better serving our historically underserved low-income students and students of color.

Thank you.