

The Protecting Students from Worthless Degrees Act
Senators Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Dick Durbin (D-IL),
and Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL-08)

Seventy-eight years ago Congress provided our service members unprecedented access to higher education through the G.I. bill. Our strong federal commitment and investment in higher education continued with the creation of federal student loans, Pell Grants, and military tuition assistance—giving future generations of Americans the opportunity to pursue a college education and obtain the skills needed to succeed to help build our nation’s middle class.

However, because of a loophole in federal financial aid laws, schools that are institutionally accredited may offer individual programs that lack state licensing or programmatic accreditation that are required for graduates to enter the field for which they were trained. Students who enter these programs are told that they will be prepared for a particular job, only to discover after graduating, often with student loan debt, that they are not qualified to work in their intended field or even take a licensing exam. These students are promised a quality opportunity for advancement, but receive no such thing.

That is why Senator Merkley, Senator Durbin, and Representative Krishnamoorthi are introducing the *Protecting Students from Worthless Degrees Act* to close a loophole that allows institutions to take federal financial aid dollars for students to attend unaccredited degree programs that often leave students deep in debt and unable to work in their chosen field, and taxpayers helping to foot the bill.

The legislation also reinstates the certification requirements from the Gainful Employment rule, which was eliminated by the Trump administration. These requirements prevented career education programs from receiving Title IV federal student aid dollars if they failed to keep their promise that students who enter a program will graduate with the necessary skills to find employment—a crucial consumer protection for students facing predatory for-profit college schemes.

The Protecting Students from Worthless Degrees Act would:

- Ensure that students and taxpayers are not left footing the bill for predatory and worthless degree programs;
- Require all programs—including distance education programs—to meet any federal or state licensure requirements and programmatic accreditation that is necessary for graduates to enter their intended field;
- Make institutions that fail to meet this crucial consumer protection requirement ineligible to receive any federal student financial assistance, including Pell Grants, direct loans, G.I. Bill benefits, or Department of Defense Tuition Assistance funds; and
- Undo the Trump administration’s decision to eliminate the certification requirements from the Gainful Employment rule, returning to rules that ensure that career education programs must keep their promises to students in order to receive Title IV financial aid funds.

With college costs and student loan debt continuing to rise, it is more important than ever that both students and taxpayers receive a worthwhile return on their investment, and that students are protected from fraudulent practices. The *Protecting Students from Worthless Degrees Act* would help ensure that students receive the quality education and meaningful career opportunities they were promised – a fair deal that students deserve.