

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the world's largest business federation representing the interests of more than three million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations, and dedicated to promoting, protecting, and defending America's free enterprise system, opposes H.R. 5, the "Student Success Act."

The Chamber is encouraged by the priority placed by this Congress on reauthorizing the "Elementary and Secondary Education Act" (ESEA). However, while the Chamber supports many provisions of H.R. 5, significant concerns with several key issues remain. As a strong supporter of ensuring accountability for results at all levels of America's education system, the Chamber's opposition to this bill rests primarily with the lack of strong accountability provisions that demonstrate a national commitment to the success of every child.

A simplified, easier to administer ESEA that remains true to the basic principles that form the foundation of the federal role in K-12 education – high academic standards and assessments for all students; accountability for all schools; clear information and real choices for parents and students; and taxpayer accountability – is essential to improving America's education system. While the Chamber supports efforts by Congress to provide a greater level of flexibility and to reduce the federal footprint in education, there must remain a discrete but robust role for the federal government in ensuring accountability for the taxpayer investment and results for students. It was not until accountability was introduced into the education system through No Child Left Behind that real progress on academic achievement was made. Congress should not retreat from that progress, especially as it is possible to hold states and districts accountable while providing more flexibility in goal setting and consequences for failure to meet those goals.

The Chamber cannot support H.R. 5 because this ESEA reauthorization would turn back the clock to the days when billions of dollars were spent on education without any expectation of results for the taxpayer investment. H.R. 5 offers transparency as a substitute for accountability, and the role of the federal government in ensuring results for the taxpayer investment would be abandoned.

The Chamber strongly believes states must have rigorous accountability systems that hold schools accountable for student achievement with clear and ambitious targets for improvement from year to year. With all schools and all students incorporated into these systems, schools that continually fail to meet the needs of students should be held responsible for taking steps toward improving student achievement in order to continue receiving federal support. The Chamber supports providing flexibility to states in setting those goals and defining

consequences for not meeting them, but also believes strongly that the federal law should set broad guidelines.

Schools should be accountable for graduating students with the skills necessary to go to college or enter the workplace. The Chamber believes that in order to close the achievement gap, states must adopt rigorous college- and career-ready standards and aligned statewide assessments. However, H.R. 5 would require only that states have academic standards without explicitly including that the standards must be “college- and career-ready.” This could inadvertently result in the lowering of expectations for school and student achievement, as well as impede state-led efforts already underway.

Despite concerns about the accountability system, the Chamber applauds provisions in H.R. 5 that would maintain current law with regard to annual assessments in reading and mathematics and include grade span assessments in science. As a result, the Chamber strongly opposes any attempt to modify any of these provisions and specifically opposes the Goodlatte amendment #74, which would allow districts to opt out of their statewide assessments by creating their own.

This bill would also make improvements over current law in several key areas. For example, the Chamber supports allowing Title I funds to “follow the child,” particularly when students are stuck in persistently low-performing schools. Therefore, the Chamber is pleased to see that not only would H.R. 5 reserve a portion of Title I funds for public school choice, but it would also add the Local Academic Flexible Grants and include the business community in initiatives to improve student achievement.

In the absence of congressional action on ESEA, the U.S. Department of Education has issued waivers to states. The process of reauthorizing ESEA by waivers is uneven in its application and has resulted in confusion and uncertainty. In fact, many of the current waivers have the same flaws that would likely occur should H.R. 5 be implemented.

While the Chamber opposes H.R. 5, we strongly believe the law needs to be reauthorized as soon as possible. Therefore, even though the Chamber key voted in opposition to this legislation last Congress, the Chamber will not key vote this bill now because we are committed to working with members in the House and Senate to address these issues as the legislative process continues in the Senate and in the conference committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Bruce Josten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "R." and last name "Josten" being the most prominent parts.

R. Bruce Josten