

Key Takeaways from the Senate HELP Committee's Hearing on "The State of Higher Education"

May 21, 2025

On May 21, 2025, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions ("HELP" or the "Committee") hosted a hearing titled, "The State of Higher Education." The hearing, which lasted approximately two hours, featured three college and university leaders: Tuskegee University President Mark A. Brown, Taylor University President Michael Lindsay, and Austin Community College District Chancellor Russell Lowery-Hart. They were joined by two experts on higher education policy, Andrew Gillen, a Research Fellow at the Cato institute, and Mike Pierce, Executive Director of the Student Borrower Protection Center.

The key takeaways from the hearing are summarized below:

- Majority Committee members highlighted increasing tuition costs and argued that some universities and degree programs provide a negative return on student and parent investment. While these members expressed concern about the debt burden placed on students and families, they also emphasized the importance of individual financial responsibility.
- Majority members argued that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion ("DEI") initiatives and antisemitism are antithetical to the values of higher education and detrimental to the educational missions of academic institutions.
- Majority members cited the proliferation of DEI roles as a key contributor to the rising cost of higher education. They argued that these roles are being subsidized by taxpayers, including through federal Graduate Plus loans.
- Witnesses highlighted the importance of federal financial aid, particularly Pell Grants, for making education accessible to students across the economic spectrum.
- Members and witnesses emphasized the important role that faith-based institutions, historically-Black colleges and universities, and community colleges play in educating future leaders, driving innovation, and contributing to the economy.

- Minority members argued that certain provisions in the pending House reconciliation bill—including those limiting Pell Grant eligibility and restricting or eliminating certain federal student loan programs—would reduce access to higher education for low-income students.

* * *

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.



David A. O'Neil
Partner, Washington, D.C.
+1 202 383 8040
+1 202 809 1995
daoneil@debevoise.com



Jane Shvets
Partner, New York/London
+1 212 909 6573
+44 20 7786 9163
jshvets@debevoise.com



Carter Burwell
Counsel, Washington, D.C.
+1 202 383 8149
cburwell@debevoise.com



John Sullivan Baker
Associate, Washington, D.C.
+1 202 383 8113
jdsullivanbaker@debevoise.com



Cameron B. Wolfe
Associate, Washington, D.C.
+1 202 383 8279
cbwolfe@debevoise.com

This publication is for general information purposes only. It is not intended to provide, nor is it to be used as, a substitute for legal advice. In some jurisdictions it may be considered attorney advertising.