

Congressional Progressive Caucus
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

July 1, 2016

Lloyd Horwich
Acting Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Acting Assistant Secretary Lloyd:

As Co-Chairs of the Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC), we write to you regarding this past week's meeting of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), where the renewal of specific accrediting agencies' recognition were discussed. We are extremely concerned with the accrediting recognition of the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS) and support the final recommendation that was made by NACIQI.

As an accreditation agency whose approval will affect the flow of billions in federal student aid, ACICS must guarantee that federal dollars are well spent and students are receiving high-quality education. Unfortunately, case after case has proven that ACICS has been negligent in its duties, and permitted college mismanagement of federal student aid, including acts of alleged fraud and misrepresentation that resulted in jail time for an institutional leader¹.

According to a recent report from the Center for American Progress (CAP), ACICS has approved wholly or in part 17 institutions, campuses, or corporate entities that have faced federal or state investigation over the last several years. In total, the investigated colleges have taken in more than \$5.7 billion in federal funds over the past three years. That represents 52 percent of all federal aid dollars received by ACICS-approved colleges during that time period.^[1] An accreditor acting as a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars would have used these investigations to spur deeper investigations of the colleges it oversees. However, ACICS was unable to identify serious problems when it did investigate the institutions it accredits. Moreover, from 2010 to 2015 there were 90 instances where ACICS named campuses under investigation to its honor roll.^[2] Perhaps the most egregious instance of this pattern occurred in 2011 when ACICS named five campuses of FastTrain College in Florida to its honor roll just months before the Federal Bureau of Investigation raided the chain. The former head of FastTrain was recently sentenced to 96 months in prison for stealing more than \$6.6 million from the federal government.

¹ http://www.warren.senate.gov/files/documents/2016-6-10_ACICS_Report.pdf

^[1] <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/higher-education/report/2016/06/06/138826/acics-must-go/>

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As Co-Chairs of the CPC we care deeply about the quality of higher education and the future of our students. The decision NACIQI made is more than just about ACICS, it also calls in to question the viability of the larger accreditation system. Finally, we are concerned ACICS is incapable of acting as an assessor of college quality, as its repeated poor judgment has left students and billions of taxpayer dollars at risk. For the good of both American students and taxpayers, we hope you take into consideration our serious concerns regarding ACICS' role as a gatekeeper for federal financial aid.

Sincerely,


Raúl M. Grijalva
Co-Chair, Congressional Progressive Caucus


Keith Ellison
Co-Chair, Congressional Progressive Caucus

CC: John B. King, Secretary, Department of Education