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Robert W. Mendenhall, Ph.D.

President

July 22, 2013

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The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
House Committee on Education and the Workforce
United States House of Representatives
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Kline:

I am writing to thank you for introducing H.R. 2637, the Supporting Academic Freedom Through Regulatory Relief Act.

Western Governors University (WGU) is a nonprofit, fully online university established in 1997 by a bi-partisan group of 19 U.S. governors. The university's mission from the start has been to demonstrate that higher education can be both affordable and high quality. WGU offers accredited bachelor's and master's degree programs in the four high-demand workforce areas of business, information technology, K-12 teacher education, and health professions, including nursing. Growing by over 20% annually, the university has over 39,000 students and 25,000 graduates in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

In order for higher education to continue to move towards higher quality, affordable education we need a regulatory environment that fosters those goals. Everyone supports the goals of innovation, but we have seen over the past several years that rather than supporting innovation, new regulations have been enacted that take us in the opposite direction. Two of those regulations that have specifically had an adverse effect are those dealing with Credit Hour and State Authorization. Simply put, State Authorization has cost WGU more than \$1,000,000 over the past two-years. Those precious dollars could have been spent much more effectively on students.

With regards to the Credit Hour regulation, it perpetuates the myth of measuring time and distributing financial aid based on time. Specifically, it locks in place the current productivity of higher education. If an institution like Carnegie Mellon can create a course that can educate students just as well in half the time as a traditional course, they are only permitted to give half the credit for that course, even though the learning is equal or better than the traditional course. We need to remove barriers that judge institutions based on seat time, credit hours, and student-faculty ratios. The myth of the credit hour as a proxy to measure learning, allocate funding, or hold students and institutions accountable must end. It creates perverse incentives that hinder progress and innovation. We base almost every policy in higher education on a vague "credit hour" measure equaling 15 clock hours of actual time in the classroom and 30 hours of study time outside of the classroom. It's clear that we don't actually measure this time and if we did, it would vary widely between students.

It is vital that Congress support new, more cost-effective models of higher education. America needs our legislators to highlight and promote new models that focus on outputs and ensure that future legislation and regulations support, rather than hinder, development of new models. H.R. 2637 would move us in the right direction by providing regulatory relief from the Department of



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Education's state authorization and credit hour definition regulations and allow greater flexibility under the incentive compensation regulation for third-party service providers.

Chairman

Jim Geringer

Governor, Wyoming 1995-2003

Thank you for your work on behalf of innovation in higher education.

Chairman Emeritus

Michael O. Leavitt

Governor, Utah 1993-2003

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert W. Mendenhall

President

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CC: Representative Virginia Foxx
Representative Alcee Hastings