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New Department of Education Rule Places Students at Risk: Students Seeking Career-Focused Education Will be Left in the Cold

By **AiSchaumburg**

For nearly 100 years, the academic institution founded by my grandfather has served generations of creative students by providing them an education that prepares them for careers in the applied arts. I am proud to be a third-generation president at The Illinois Institute of Art – Schaumburg, where my father, grandfather, and grandmother have also held this honor. Now, due to a rule proposed by the U.S. Department of Education, the creative students we serve are at risk.

Students are at risk of losing out on their chance at higher education. They are at risk of not pursuing their professional dream. They are at risk of unemployment.

The proposed rule, cleverly termed "Gainful Employment," will remove student choice and deny access to programs and degrees for many high-demand jobs. The result is that entire programs now available under Title IV federal financial aid could be deemed ineligible if the Education Department's unrealistic and arbitrary "one-size-fits-all" debt-service-to-income ratio test does not meet the rule's criteria. Career-focused education, such as that provided by The Illinois Institute of Art – Schaumburg, is an area of opportunity that could be taken away from students if this proposed rule becomes a reality.

An educational structure such as ours is not the same as a traditional university. We are an accredited college, offering a variety of bachelor's and associate's degrees, but we are so much more. We offer flexibility when students have other responsibilities that keep them from attending limited class schedules. The faculty at our college consists of current professionals in their fields, bringing modern and relevant approaches to the students. We offer classes year-round, helping students to shorten their time between now and their career. Additionally, our staff works one-on-one with students early in their college tenure to help ensure a level of professionalism upon graduation, as well as assisting them in securing employment in their chosen field before and - if needed - after graduation.

A majority of the students we serve rely on Title IV financial aid to complete their college education. Unfortunately, the Gainful Employment rule discriminates against many of these students by gating access to postsecondary education for low-income

individuals and minorities. As the importance of higher education continues to grow, so does the need of many students to rely partially or wholly on Title IV financial aid. Yet this proposed rule would deny far too many students access to the aid – and, consequently, the education – they need.

I have served in both the creative and academic sectors and witnessed on all sides how an education in applied arts has the ability to enhance one's professional career. The Illinois Institute of Art – Schaumburg prepares students for high-demand professions and a fulfilling career. Graduates in many of these areas fill a niche role, supplying important skills, expertise and service to our country's workforce.

Without access to Title IV financial aid, these students will not be prepared.

There is no justification for a biased, solitary, bureaucrat-driven formula that restricts funding based on a projected amount of debt.

If the Gainful Employment rule is enacted, the result will be a reduction of educated individuals in our country - less opportunity, less education, less economic success. I shudder to think of the ramifications. I urge public officials to take a hard look at the proposed Gainful Employment rule and the negative consequences it would bring; I urge them to protect students seeking opportunity and choice in the higher education marketplace.

David W. Ray

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