



March 19, 2018

The Honorable Rick Jasperse
Chairman
House Higher Education Committee
401-H State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

The Honorable Fran Millar
Chairman
Senate Higher Education Committee
18 Capitol Square
319-B CLOB
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Chairman Jasperse and Chairman Millar,

On behalf of Achieve Atlanta and the more than 2,000 students we serve, I want to reach out in support of Senate Bill 405, which creates a needs-based grant for low-income students to enroll in University System of Georgia institutions. The bill takes an important step in offsetting the sharp drop-off in financial aid for Georgia students who initially fall just below the 3.0 GPA HOPE Scholarship eligibility threshold prior to or during college. However, as a scholarship provider for many low-income Atlanta Public School graduates, Achieve Atlanta is concerned that the bill's current 15-hour weekly work requirement may threaten eligibility for low-income students who are employed through a federal work study program.

To provide some context, [Achieve Atlanta](#) was founded in 2015 with the goal of doubling the number of Atlanta Public Schools' graduates who earn a postsecondary degree by 2025. Over the last two years, we have provided a privately funded, needs-based scholarship to low-income Atlanta Public Schools graduates who finish their last two years in APS and have at least a 2.0 GPA. Over the first two years, we have awarded 1,400 scholarships and expect to award at least another 850 this year. To receive our funds, Scholars must enroll full-time in college the fall following high school graduation, and we pair a coach with all Scholars who remain in state to help them persist and earn their degree. While still early in our existence, we have already seen the percentage of APS graduates who enroll in college the following fall increase from 51% in 2015 to 57% in 2017.

Even with our scholarship, our Scholars face many financial, social-emotional, and academic barriers to success. **Senate Bill 405 would provide a critical step toward helping students to remain in school and minimize student loan burden. However, the work requirement as currently constructed could be problematic for federal work study students.** The federal work study program provides part-time jobs, most of which are on campus, for many students with financial need. Work study jobs are often more convenient for students, and supervisors are generally more understanding of a student's course schedule than external employers.

In 2016-2017, 12,389 Georgia students participated in federal work study and earned an average of \$1,895.¹ Most institutions limit work study to 20 hours per week, but many students work fewer than 15 hours per week. For example, nearly two-thirds of first-year Achieve Atlanta Scholars who reported participating in work study said they worked fewer than 15 hours per week. As a result, to become eligible for the grant as outlined in SB 405, these students would either have to increase work study hours—which may or may not be feasible with program funding limitations—or obtain another job to work a few more hours that may be logistically challenging with course schedules. While we recognize the importance of students working to offset the cost of college, we want to ensure that the grant’s work requirements align with already existing work study programs and avoid complicated work arrangements that may impede students’ ability to succeed academically.

With these concerns in mind, **we recommend exempting students participating in federal work study from the 15-hour work requirement.** To address this in the bill, line 45 could be amended to state, “a student must be employed through a federal work study program or work at least 15 hours per week during the semester . . .”

Thank you for your work on this important bill and for considering our feedback. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with any further questions.

Sincerely,



Tina Fernandez
Executive Director
Achieve Atlanta

¹ This total includes both undergraduate and graduate students. The U.S. Department of Education does not publish state-level data for only undergraduates, but nationwide 93% of work study participants are undergraduates. Source: [Federal Campus-Based Programs Data Book 2017](#)