

To Members of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee:

As the Committee prepares to mark-up the America COMPETES Act Reauthorization Act of 2015, our Coalition issued the following public statement today on the underlying bill:

Our Coalition is pleased with the focus on STEM education in the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015, which would put in place a more robust system to coordinate and improve the extensive portfolio of STEM education programs operated by many different federal agencies. Ensuring our students have the critical STEM skills they need to succeed in the global economy is essential to U.S. competitiveness – and the federal government plays a vital role in this endeavor.

Specifically, the FIRST Act would create a new function, housed within the National Science Foundation, to coordinate STEM education activities conducted across the government. The bill would also create a new federal STEM Education Advisory Panel that will provide a much-needed outlet for outside stakeholder input – especially from “on the ground” educators – that will help inform federal plans and budget priorities. Both of these provisions will help improve the effectiveness of federal investments in STEM education over time and address specific issues that were raised in our Coalition’s previous testimony before the Committee.

Despite these positive aspects, the bill still needs to be improved in two specific ways:

- We urge a revision of the bill to include the much more inclusive definition of the STEM fields that was included in the 2014 version of this legislation. Our Coalition strongly supports an inclusive definition and use of the term “STEM education” that is not limited to only math and science, but also embraces engineering and technology, and broadly encompasses related and emerging STEM fields and their unique needs.*
- The bill should allow for reasonable year-to-year growth in the EHR authorization level to allow for budget growth comparable to other high-priority areas of the Foundation.*

The authorization level for the National Science Foundation’s Education and Human Resources (EHR) Directorate is frozen at the FY2015 funding level, which is actually lower than the current Administration budget request. Further complicating this situation is the reality that other portions of the bill add additional missions to the EHR Directorate, creating further pressure on budgets.

Finally, we implore the Committee leadership to work in a deliberate manner to seek bipartisan agreement on the wide-ranging science and technology policies addressed in this legislation. The original America COMPETES Act represented a hallmark of bipartisan Congressional action to bolster U.S. competitiveness in the global economy. This latest reauthorization effort should not depart from this long-established tradition.

-James

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STEM Education Coalition