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114TH CONGRESS 2D SESSION

H.R.3179

[Report No. 114-]

To amend the loan counseling requirements under the Higher Education Act of 1965, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

July 23, 2015

Mr. Guthrie (for himself, Mr. Allen, Ms. Bonamici, Mr. Kline, Mr. Scott of Virginia, Mr. Hunter, Mr. Walberg, Mr. Heck of Nevada, Mr. Messer, Mr. Carter of Georgia, Ms. Stefanik, Mrs. Davis of California, Mr. Grijalva, Mr. Sablan, Mr. Pocan, Mr. Takano, Ms. Clark of Massachusetts, Mr. Desaulnier, and Mr. Hudson) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce

July --, 2016

Reported with an amendment, committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, and ordered to be printed

[Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in italic]

[For text of introduced bill, see copy of bill as introduced on June 23, 2015]

A BILL

To amend the loan counseling requirements under the Higher Education Act of 1965, and for other purposes.

1	Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
2	tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
3	SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.
4	This Act may be cited as the "Empowering Students
5	Through Enhanced Financial Counseling Act".
6	SEC. 2. ANNUAL COUNSELING.
7	Section 485(l) of the Higher Education Act of 1965
8	(20 U.S.C. 1092(l)) is amended to read as follows:
9	"(l) Annual Financial Aid Counseling.—
10	"(1) Annual disclosure required.—
11	"(A) In General.—Each eligible institu-
12	tion shall ensure that each individual who re-
13	ceives a Federal Pell Grant or a loan made
14	under part D (other than a Federal Direct Con-
15	solidation Loan) receives comprehensive informa-
16	tion on the terms and conditions of such Federal
17	Pell Grant or loan and the responsibilities the
18	individual has with respect to such Federal Pell
19	Grant or loan. Such information shall be pro-
20	vided, for each award year for which the indi-
21	vidual receives such Federal Pell Grant or loan,
22	in a simple and understandable manner—
23	"(i) during a counseling session con-
24	ducted in person;

1	"(ii) online, with the individual ac-
2	knowledging receipt of the information; or
3	"(iii) through the use of the online
4	counseling tool described in subsection
5	(n)(1)(B).
6	"(B) Use of interactive programs.—In
7	the case of institutions not using the online
8	counseling tool described in subsection $(n)(1)(B)$,
9	the Secretary shall require such institutions to
10	carry out the requirements of subparagraph (A)
11	through the use of interactive programs, during
12	an annual counseling session that is in-person or
13	online, that test the individual's understanding
14	of the terms and conditions of the Federal Pell
15	Grant or loan awarded to the individual, using
16	simple and understandable language and clear
17	formatting.
18	"(2) All individuals.—The information to be
19	provided under paragraph (1)(A) to each individual
20	receiving counseling under this subsection shall in-
21	clude the following:
22	"(A) An explanation of how the individual
23	may budget for typical educational expenses and
24	a sample budget based on the cost of attendance
25	for the institution.

1	"(B) An explanation that an individual has
2	a right to annually request a disclosure of infor-
3	mation collected by a consumer reporting agency
4	pursuant to section 612(a) of the Fair Credit Re-
5	porting Act (15 U.S.C. 1681j(a)).
6	"(C) Based on the most recent data avail-
7	able from the American Community Survey
8	available from the Department of Commerce, the
9	estimated average income and percentage of em-
10	ployment in the State of domicile of the indi-
11	vidual for individuals with—
12	"(i) a high school diploma or equiva-
13	lent;
14	"(ii) some post-secondary education
15	without completion of a degree or certifi-
16	cate; and
17	"(iii) a bachelor's degree.
18	"(D) An introduction to the financial man-
19	agement resources provided by the Financial Lit-
20	eracy and Education Commission.
21	"(3) Students receiving federal pell
22	GRANTS.—The information to be provided under
23	paragraph (1)(A) to each student receiving a Federal
24	Pell Grant shall include the following:

1	"(A) An explanation of the terms and con-
2	ditions of the Federal Pell Grant.
3	"(B) An explanation of approved edu-
4	cational expenses for which the student may use
5	the Federal Pell Grant.
6	"(C) An explanation of why the student
7	may have to repay the Federal Pell Grant.
8	"(D) An explanation of the maximum num-
9	ber of semesters or equivalent for which the stu-
10	dent may be eligible to receive a Federal Pell
11	Grant, and a statement of the amount of time re-
12	maining for which the student may be eligible to
13	receive a Federal Pell Grant.
14	"(E) An explanation that if the student
15	transfers to another institution not all of the stu-
16	dent's courses may be acceptable in transfer to-
17	ward meeting specific degree or program require-
18	ments at such institution, but the amount of
19	time remaining for which a student may be eli-
20	gible to receive a Federal Pell Grant, as provided
21	under subparagraph (D), will not change.
22	"(F) An explanation of how the student
23	may seek additional financial assistance from
24	the institution's financial aid office due to a

1	change in the student's financial circumstances,
2	and the contact information for such office.
3	"(4) Borrowers receiving loans made
4	UNDER PART D (OTHER THAN PARENT PLUS
5	LOANS).—The information to be provided under para-
6	graph (1)(A) to a borrower of a loan made under part
7	D (other than a Federal Direct PLUS Loan made on
8	behalf of a dependent student) shall include the fol-
9	lowing:
10	"(A) To the extent practicable, the effect of
11	accepting the loan to be disbursed on the eligi-
12	bility of the borrower for other forms of student
13	$financial\ assistance.$
14	"(B) An explanation of the use of the mas-
15	ter promissory note.
16	"(C) An explanation that the borrower is
17	not required to accept the full amount of the loan
18	offered to the borrower.
19	"(D) An explanation that the borrower
20	should consider accepting any grant, scholarship,
21	or State or Federal work-study jobs for which the
22	borrower is eligible prior to accepting Federal
23	student loans.
24	"(E) A recommendation to the borrower to
25	exhaust the borrower's Federal student loan op-

1	tions prior to taking out private education loans,
2	an explanation that Federal student loans typi-
3	cally offer better terms and conditions than pri-
4	vate education loans, an explanation of treat-
5	ment of loans made under part D and private
6	education loans in bankruptcy, and an expla-
7	nation that if a borrower decides to take out a
8	private education loan—
9	"(i) the borrower has the ability to se-
10	lect a private educational lender of the bor-
11	rower's choice;
12	"(ii) the proposed private education
13	loan may impact the borrower's potential
14	eligibility for other financial assistance, in-
15	cluding Federal financial assistance under
16	this title; and
17	"(iii) the borrower has a right—
18	"(I) to accept the terms of the pri-
19	vate education loan within 30 calendar
20	days following the date on which the
21	application for such loan is approved
22	and the borrower receives the required
23	disclosure documents, pursuant to sec-
24	tion 128(e) of the Truth in Lending
25	Act (15 U.S.C. 1638(e)); and

1	"(II) to cancel such loan within 3
2	business days of the date on which the
3	loan is consummated, pursuant to sec-
4	tion 128(e)(7) of such Act (15 U.S.C.
5	1638(e)(7)).
6	"(F) An explanation of the approved edu-
7	cational expenses for which the borrower may use
8	a loan made under part D.
9	"(G) Information on the annual and aggre-
10	gate loan limits for Federal Direct Stafford
11	Loans and Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford
12	Loans.
13	"(H) Information on how interest accrues
14	and is capitalized during periods when the inter-
15	est is not paid by either the borrower or the Sec-
16	retary.
17	"(I) In the case of a Federal Direct PLUS
18	Loan or a Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford
19	Loan, the option of the borrower to pay the in-
20	terest while the borrower is in school.
21	"(J) The definition of half-time enrollment
22	at the institution, during regular terms and
23	summer school, if applicable, and the con-
24	sequences of not maintaining at least half-time
25	enrollment.

1	"(K) An explanation of the importance of
2	contacting the appropriate offices at the institu-
3	tion of higher education if the borrower with-
4	draws prior to completing the borrower's pro-
5	gram of study so that the institution can provide
6	exit counseling, including information regarding
7	the borrower's repayment options and loan con-
8	solidation.
9	"(L) For a first-time borrower—
10	"(i) a statement of the anticipated bal-
11	ance on the loan for which the borrower is
12	receiving counseling under this subsection;
13	"(ii) based on such anticipated bal-
14	ance, the anticipated monthly payment
15	amount under, at minimum—
16	"(I) the standard repayment plan;
17	and
18	"(II) an income-based repayment
19	plan under section 493C, as deter-
20	mined using regionally available data
21	from the Bureau of Labor Statistics of
22	the average starting salary for the oc-
23	cupation in which the borrower has an
24	interest in or intends to be employed;
25	and

1	"(iii) an estimate of the projected
2	monthly payment amount under each re-
3	payment plan described in clause (ii), based
4	on the average cumulative indebtedness at
5	graduation for borrowers of loans made
6	under part D who are in the same program
7	of study as the borrower.
8	"(M) For a borrower with an outstanding
9	balance of principal or interest due on a loan
10	made under this title—
11	"(i) a current statement of the amount
12	of such outstanding balance and interest ac-
13	crued;
14	"(ii) based on such outstanding bal-
15	ance, the anticipated monthly payment
16	amount under, at minimum, the standard
17	repayment plan and, using regionally
18	available data from the Bureau of Labor
19	Statistics of the average starting salary for
20	the occupation the borrower intends to be
21	employed, an income-based repayment plan
22	under section 493C; and
23	"(iii) an estimate of the projected
24	monthly payment amount under each re-

1	payment plan described in clause (ii), based
2	on—
3	"(I) the outstanding balance de-
4	scribed in clause (i);
5	"(II) the anticipated outstanding
6	balance on the loan for which the stu-
7	dent is receiving counseling under this
8	subsection; and
9	"(III) a projection for any other
10	loans made under part D that the bor-
11	rower is reasonably expected to accept
12	during the borrower's program of study
13	based on at least the expected increase
14	in the cost of attendance of such pro-
15	gram.
16	"(N) The obligation of the borrower to
17	repay the full amount of the loan, regardless of
18	whether the borrower completes or does not com-
19	plete the program in which the borrower is en-
20	rolled within the regular time for program com-
21	pletion.
22	"(O) The likely consequences of default on
23	the loan, including adverse credit reports, delin-
24	quent debt collection procedures under Federal
25	law, and litigation, and a notice of the institu-

1	tion's most recent cohort default rate (defined in
2	section 435(m)), an explanation of the cohort de-
3	fault rate, the most recent national average co-
4	hort default rate, and the most recent national
5	average cohort default rate for the category of in-
6	stitution described in section $435(m)(4)$ to which
7	the institution belongs.
8	"(P) Information on the National Student
9	Loan Data System and how the borrower can
10	access the borrower's records.
11	"(Q) The contact information for the insti-
12	tution's financial aid office or other appropriate
13	office at the institution the borrower may contact
14	if the borrower has any questions about the bor-
15	rower's rights and responsibilities or the terms
16	and conditions of the loan.
17	"(5) Borrowers receiving parent plus
18	LOANS FOR DEPENDENT STUDENTS.—The information
19	to be provided under paragraph (1)(A) to a borrower
20	of a Federal Direct PLUS Loan made on behalf of a
21	dependent student shall include the following:
22	"(A) The information described in subpara-
23	graphs (A) through (C) and (N) through (Q) of
24	paragraph (4).

1	"(B) The option of the borrower to pay the
2	interest on the loan while the loan is in
3	deferment.
4	"(C) For a first-time borrower of such
5	loan—
6	"(i) a statement of the anticipated bal-
7	ance on the loan for which the borrower is
8	receiving counseling under this subsection;
9	"(ii) based on such anticipated bal-
10	ance, the anticipated monthly payment
11	amount under the standard repayment
12	plan; and
13	"(iii) an estimate of the projected
14	monthly payment amount under the stand-
15	ard repayment plan, based on the average
16	cumulative indebtedness of other borrowers
17	of Federal Direct PLUS Loans made on be-
18	half of dependent students who are in the
19	same program of study as the student on
20	whose behalf the borrower borrowed the
21	loan.
22	"(D) For a borrower with an outstanding
23	balance of principal or interest due on such
24	loan—

1	"(i) a statement of the amount of such
2	outstanding balance;
3	"(ii) based on such outstanding bal-
4	ance, the anticipated monthly payment
5	amount under the standard repayment
6	plan; and
7	"(iii) an estimate of the projected
8	monthly payment amount under the stand-
9	ard repayment plan, based on—
10	"(I) the outstanding balance de-
11	scribed in clause (i);
12	"(II) the anticipated outstanding
13	balance on the loan for which the bor-
14	rower is receiving counseling under
15	this subsection; and
16	"(III) a projection for any other
17	Federal Direct PLUS Loan made on
18	behalf of the dependent student that the
19	borrower is reasonably expected to ac-
20	cept during the program of study of
21	such student based on at least the ex-
22	pected increase in the cost of attend-
23	ance of such program.

1	"(E) Debt management strategies that are
2	designed to facilitate the repayment of such in-
3	debtedness.
4	"(F) An explanation that the borrower has
5	the options to prepay each loan, pay each loan
6	on a shorter schedule, and change repayment
7	plans.
8	"(G) For each Federal Direct PLUS Loan
9	made on behalf of a dependent student for which
10	the borrower is receiving counseling under this
11	subsection, the contact information for the loan
12	servicer of the loan and a link to such servicer's
13	Website.
14	"(6) Annual loan acceptance.—Prior to mak-
15	ing the first disbursement of a loan made under part
16	D (other than a Federal Direct Consolidation Loan)
17	to a borrower for an award year, an eligible institu-
18	tion, shall, as part of carrying out the counseling re-
19	quirements of this subsection for the loan, ensure that
20	after receiving the applicable counseling under para-
21	graphs (2), (4), and (5) for the loan the borrower ac-
22	cepts the loan for such award year by—
23	"(A) signing the master promissory note for
24	$the\ loan;$

1	"(B) signing and returning to the institu-
2	tion a separate written statement that affirma-
3	tively states that the borrower accepts the loan;
4	or
5	"(C) electronically signing an electronic
6	version of the statement described in subpara-
7	graph (B).".
8	SEC. 3. EXIT COUNSELING.
9	Section 485(b) of the Higher Education Act of 1965
10	(20 U.S.C. 1092(b)) is amended—
11	(1) in paragraph $(1)(A)$ —
12	(A) in the matter preceding clause (i), by
13	striking "through financial aid offices or other-
14	wise" and inserting "through the use of an inter-
15	active program, during an exit counseling ses-
16	sion that is in-person or online, or through the
17	use of the online counseling tool described in sub-
18	section $(n)(1)(A)$ ";
19	(B) by redesignating clauses (i) through (ix)
20	as clauses (iv) through (xii), respectively;
21	(C) by inserting before clause (iv), as so re-
22	designated, the following:
23	"(i) a summary of the outstanding balance of
24	principal and interest due on the loans made to the
25	borrower under part B, D, or E;

1	"(ii) an explanation of the grace period pre-
2	ceding repayment and the expected date that the bor-
3	rower will enter repayment;
4	"(iii) an explanation that the borrower has the
5	option to pay any interest that has accrued while the
6	borrower was in school or that may accrue during the
7	grace period preceding repayment or during an au-
8	thorized period of deferment or forbearance, prior to
9	the capitalization of the interest;";
10	(D) in clause (iv), as so redesignated—
11	(i) by striking "sample information
12	showing the average" and inserting "infor-
13	mation, based on the borrower's outstanding
14	balance described in clause (i), showing the
15	borrower's"; and
16	(ii) by striking "of each plan" and in-
17	serting "of at least the standard repayment
18	plan and the income-based repayment plan
19	under section 493C";
20	(E) in clause (ix), as so redesignated—
21	(i) by inserting "decreased credit
22	score," after "credit reports,"; and
23	(ii) by inserting "reduced ability to
24	rent or purchase a home or car, potential

1	difficulty in securing employment," after
2	"Federal law,";
3	(F) in clause (x), as so redesignated, by
4	striking "consolidation loan under section 428C
5	or a";
6	(G) in clauses (xi) and (xii), as so redesig-
7	nated, by striking "and" at the end; and
8	(H) by adding at the end the following:
9	"(xiii) for each of the borrower's loans made
10	under part B, D, or E for which the borrower is re-
11	ceiving counseling under this subsection, the contact
12	information for the loan servicer of the loan and a
13	link to such servicer's Website; and
14	"(xiv) an explanation that an individual has a
15	right to annually request a disclosure of information
16	collected by a consumer reporting agency pursuant to
17	section 612(a) of the Fair Credit Reporting Act (15
18	$U.S.C.\ 1681j(a)).$ ";
19	(2) in paragraph (1)(B)—
20	(A) by inserting "online or" before "in
21	writing"; and
22	(B) by adding before the period at the end
23	the following: ", except that in the case of an in-
24	stitution using the online counseling tool de-
25	scribed in subsection $(n)(1)(A)$, the Secretary

1	shall attempt to provide such information to the
2	student in the manner described in subsection
3	(n)(3)(C)"; and
4	(3) in paragraph (2)(C), by inserting ", such as
5	the online counseling tool described in subsection
6	(n)(1)(A)," after "electronic means".
7	SEC. 4. ONLINE COUNSELING TOOLS.
8	Section 485 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20
9	U.S.C. 1092) is further amended by adding at the end the
10	following:
11	"(n) Online Counseling Tools.—
12	"(1) In general.—Beginning not later than 1
13	year after the date of enactment of the Empowering
14	Students Through Enhanced Financial Counseling
15	Act, the Secretary shall maintain—
16	"(A) an online counseling tool that provides
17	the exit counseling required under subsection (b)
18	and meets the applicable requirements of this
19	subsection; and
20	"(B) an online counseling tool that provides
21	the annual counseling required under subsection
22	(l) and meets the applicable requirements of this
23	subsection.

1	"(2) Requirements of tools.—In maintain-
2	ing the online counseling tools described in paragraph
3	(1), the Secretary shall ensure that each such tool is—
4	"(A) consumer tested, in consultation with
5	other relevant Federal agencies, to ensure that
6	the tool is effective in helping individuals under-
7	stand their rights and obligations with respect to
8	borrowing a loan made under part D or receiv-
9	ing a Federal Pell Grant;
10	"(B) understandable to students receiving
11	Federal Pell Grants and borrowers of loans made
12	under part D; and
13	"(C) freely available to all eligible institu-
14	tions.
15	"(3) Record of counseling completion.—
16	The Secretary shall—
17	"(A) use each online counseling tool de-
18	scribed in paragraph (1) to keep a record of
19	which individuals have received counseling using
20	the tool, and notify the applicable institutions of
21	the individual's completion of such counseling;
22	"(B) in the case of a borrower who receives
23	annual counseling for a loan made under part D
24	using the tool described in paragraph (1)(B), no-
25	tify the borrower by when the borrower should

1	accept, in a manner described in subsection
2	(l)(6), the loan for which the borrower has re-
3	ceived such counseling; and
4	"(C) in the case of a borrower described in
5	subsection $(b)(1)(B)$ at an institution that uses
6	the online counseling tool described in paragraph
7	(1)(A) of this subsection, the Secretary shall at-
8	tempt to provide the information described in
9	subsection $(b)(1)(A)$ to the borrower through such
10	tool.".
11	SEC. 5. LONGITUDINAL STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
12	STUDENT LOAN COUNSELING.
13	(a) In General.—Not later than 1 year after the date
14	of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Education, acting
15	through the Director of the Institute of Education Sciences,
16	shall begin conducting a rigorous, longitudinal study of the
17	impact and effectiveness of the student loan counseling—
18	(1) provided under subsections (b), (l), and (n)
19	of section 485 of the Higher Education Act of 1965
20	(20 U.S.C. 1092), as amended by this Act; and
21	(2) provided through such other means as the
22	Secretary of Education may determine.
23	(b) Contents.—
24	(1) Borrower information.—The longitudinal
25	study carried out under subsection (a) shall include

1	borrower information, in the aggregate and
2	disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, income, and
3	status as an individual with a disability, on—
4	(A) student persistence;
5	(B) degree attainment;
6	(C) program completion;
7	(D) successful entry into student loan re-
8	payment;
9	(E) cumulative borrowing levels; and
10	(F) such other factors as the Secretary of
11	Education may determine.
12	(2) Exception. The disaggregation under
13	paragraph (1) shall not be required in a case in
14	which the number of borrowers in a category is insuf-
15	ficient to yield statistically reliable information or
16	the results would reveal personally identifiable infor-
17	mation about an individual borrower.
18	(c) Interim Reports.—Not later than 18 months
19	after the commencement of the study under subsection (a),
20	and annually thereafter, the Secretary of Education shall
21	evaluate the progress of the study and report any short-term
22	findings to the appropriate committees of Congress.
23	SEC. 6. AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS.
24	(a) Use of Existing Funds.—Of the amount author-
25	ized to be appropriated for maintaining the Department

- 1 of Education's Financial Awareness Counseling Tool,
- 2 \$2,000,000 shall be available to carry out this Act and the
- 3 amendments made by this Act.
- 4 (b) No Additional Funds Authorized.—No funds
- 5 are authorized to be appropriated by this Act to carry out
- 6 this Act or the amendments made by this Act.