



April 4, 2019

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the over 170,000 members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I urge you to cosponsor the bipartisan Building Blocks of STEM Act (H.R. 1665) and invest in federal programs that support women and girls in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

STEM fields are rapidly becoming the most in-demand and lucrative in the world.<sup>1</sup> With global competitiveness increasingly linked to building a technologically proficient workforce, equal access to STEM education is vital to both meeting these demands and ensuring the country's economic growth. Title IX, the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in education, has helped move women and girls towards significant gains in STEM fields at all levels of education. As a result, we've seen increased participation by women in careers specifically in the biological sciences, environmental sciences, chemical sciences, and material sciences.<sup>2</sup> Despite these gains, women and girls are still underrepresented in many other high-wage, high-demand STEM careers and areas of study.

Attrition remains high at every step of the STEM education pipeline, beginning as early as elementary school through higher education and in to professorship.<sup>3</sup> AAUW's reports, *Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics*, and *Solving the Equation: The Variables for Women's Success in Engineering and Computing*, found that academic and career achievement in math and science are negatively impacted by certain environmental and social barriers – including sex stereotypes and gender bias.<sup>4</sup> The pipeline for women in STEM fields is perpetually leaking, with the attrition of women outpacing that of men at all levels in STEM careers. These impacts are seen to have an effect as early as middle school and increase in high school and college. As a result, women remain underrepresented in many STEM fields, particularly in the computing and engineering fields, where they represent 26 percent and 12 percent of workers, respectively.<sup>5</sup>

The Building Blocks of STEM Act (H.R. 1665) takes important steps to expand upon STEM education initiatives specifically for young girls. The bill achieves this by:

- Building upon the successes of the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act and directs the National Science Foundation (NSF) to award research grants to increase understanding of the factors that contribute to the participation of young girls in STEM activities.
- Developing interventions in pre-K and elementary school classrooms to increase the participation of young girls in computer science.

- Directing the NSF to consider the age distribution of a STEM education research and development projects when distributing funding under its Discovery Research PreK-12 program. A more equitable distribution of funds will improve the focus of research and development on early childhood education.

The loss of women in STEM education could result in missed opportunities to expand our technical workforce. Reducing barriers in STEM, particularly for young girls, and improving retention in these fields will lead to more effective policies and practices to increase and improve our workforce. Any serious attempt to modernize our science workforce must include efforts to broaden participation, fully include, and support the contributions of women. Congress plays a critical role in addressing this issue and that is why I urge you to cosponsor the Building Blocks of STEM Act (H.R. 1665).

Cosponsorship and votes associated with this legislation may be scored in the AAUW Action Fund *Congressional Voting Records for the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress*. Please do not hesitate to contact Pam Yuen, senior government relations coordinator, at 202/785-7712 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Deborah. J. Vagins  
Senior Vice President, Public Policy and Research

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<sup>1</sup> See Stella Fayer, Alan Lacey, and Audrey Watson, “STEM Occupations: Past, Present, and Future” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2017), <https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2017/science-technology-engineering-and-mathematics-stem-occupations-past-present-and-future/pdf/science-technology-engineering-and-mathematics-stem-occupations-past-present-and-future.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education. (2017). *Title IX: Advancing Opportunity Through Equity in Education*, <https://ncwge.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> See Christianne Corbett and Catherine Hill, “Solving the Equation: The Variables for Women’s Success in Engineering and Computing” (American Association of University Women, 2015), <https://www.aauw.org/research/solving-the-equation/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*