March 15, 2018

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the over 170,000 bipartisan members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I urge you to cosponsor the STEM Opportunities Act of 2017 (S. 1270) and support women and minorities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

There are significant barriers to gender equity in STEM education. 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. 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.[i] Furthermore, a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report identified 13 potential actions federal agencies could take to address the underrepresentation of women in STEM research, including improving data collection and performing compliance reviews that are legally required under Title IX—the federal law that prohibits sex-based discrimination in any education program or activity that receives federal funding.[ii]

The STEM Opportunities Act of 2017 takes meaningful steps towards combatting factors that limit the advancement of women and underrepresented groups in STEM through the following actions:

- Requiring federal science agencies to collect critical demographic data on the recipients of federal research awards and on STEM faculty at U.S. universities. The bill also promotes data-driven research on the participation and career trajectories of women and underrepresented minorities in STEM at institutions of higher education and Federal science agencies, including Federal laboratories.

- Employing smart policies at Federal science agencies, such as no-cost extensions and flexibility in timing for the initiation of awards for recipients of federal research awards who have caregiving responsibilities, including care for a newborn or newly adopted child or an immediate family member who is sick.

- Developing consistent federal guidance to grant reviewers and program officers through the Office of Science Technology Policy (OSTP) to minimize the effects of implicit bias in the review of federal research grants.

- Directing the National Science Foundation (NSF) to develop and disseminate guidance to universities to aid them in identifying any cultural and institutional barriers limiting the recruitment, retention, and achievement of women and minorities in academic and government

STEM research careers and to develop and implement current best practices for reducing such barriers.

- Requiring OSTP to develop similar guidance to all federal laboratories.

- Authorizing NSF to award grants to universities to implement or expand research-based practices targeted specifically to increasing the recruitment and retention of minority students and faculty.

Reducing barriers in STEM and increasing the number of women and underrepresented populations entering these fields is critical to improving America's economic interest. Additionally, better data will lead to more effective policies and practices to increase and improve our STEM workforce. Any serious attempt to modernize our science workforce must include substantive efforts to broaden participation to fully include women and underrepresented minorities. Together, Congress and federal agencies can play a vital role in addressing these issues. I urge you to cosponsor the STEM Opportunities Act of 2017.

Cosponsorship and votes associated with this legislation may be scored in the AAUW Action Fund *Congressional Voting Record for the 115th 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

---

[i] AAUW. (2015). *Solving the Equation: The Variables for Women's Success in Engineering and Computing.* http://www.aauw.org/research/solving-the-equation/.

[ii] U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). (2015). *Women in STEM Research: Better Data and Information Sharing Could Improve oversight of Federal Grant-making and Title IX Compliance.* https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-14