



June 27, 2013

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the 165,000 bipartisan members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), **I urge you to vote for the Border Security Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act (S. 744). AAUW believes the Senate must act now to fix a broken immigration system and use this opportunity to bolster critical funding for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education necessary for a globally competitive U.S. workforce.**

AAUW believes that global interdependence requires national and international policies against human trafficking and that promote peace, justice, human rights, sustainable development, and mutual security for all people. We support the civil and human rights of all immigrants, including a fair and just path to legal status. In addition, AAUW has long been a leader in responsible funding for public education and career and technical education for STEM.¹

There is rare bipartisan consensus on one thing: America's immigration system is broken. No one believes the current system is a good thing for our country, economy, or human rights. Today, it is estimated that 11 million people are living in the shadows without documentation of legal status.² Unscrupulous employers use an underground workforce of undocumented immigrants to force down wages, often in unsafe working conditions, and in extreme cases subject them to human trafficking and forced labor. At the same time, companies say they cannot find the skills they need in our domestic labor pool and thus need access to a global pool of STEM workers.

Given that funding at the federal and state level is inadequate to improve our country's system of STEM education, nontraditional higher education and career and technical programs are needed for women and girls to be prepared to meet the demand for these coveted workers. Now is the time for both comprehensive immigration reform and targeted measures to increase our country's global competitiveness through an improved immigration policy that also supports new efforts to advance and expand our domestic STEM workforce.

In the last 50 years, more than half of America's sustained economic growth was created by the five percent of the workforce who create, manage, and maintain the processes and products of innovation: engineers, scientists, and advanced-degree technologists.³ America's STEM workforce is aging while jobs requiring specialized training are growing at five times the rate of other occupations. The supply of new workers in these fields is struggling to keep up with demand, largely because women and minorities remain severely underrepresented.⁴

The Immigration Modernization Act supplements our own home-grown STEM workforce through a broad-based STEM education initiative—funded through fees collected from U.S. employers who recruit foreign STEM workers—as a component of immigration reform legislation. AAUW believes funds from this initiative can be used to attract and retain more U.S. women in the STEM workforce in order to maximize innovation, creativity, and competitiveness; boost efforts to close the gender wage gap; and end reliance on foreign temporary workers. With a more diverse workforce, scientific and technological products, services, and solutions are likely to be better designed, more competitive, and more likely to appeal to all users. Increasing the number of women in STEM education and training is an important step to patching the leaky pipeline for home-grown STEM professionals and women in particular.

AAUW believes that a highly educated and technologically sophisticated workforce is critical to our nation’s ability to compete and innovate. While the comprehensive reform bill before you is not perfect, it goes a long way to improve the nation’s current immigration system and provide a long-term solution for growing our domestic STEM workforce.

Votes associated with this issue may be included in the AAUW Action Fund *Congressional Voting Record* for the 113th Congress. If you have any questions or need additional information, feel free to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Erin Prangley, associate director for government relations, at 202/728-7730.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz
Vice President, Public Policy

¹ AAUW. (June 2013). *Public Policy Principles 2011-2013*. www.aauw.org/resource/principles-and-priorities/

² Pew Research Center. (April 2013) *Unauthorized Immigrants: How Pew Research Counts Them and What We Know About Them*. www.pewresearch.org/2013/04/17/unauthorized-immigrants-how-pew-research-counts-them-and-what-we-know-about-them/

³ BEST: Building Engineering and Science Talent. (April 2004). *The Talent Imperative: Meeting America’s Challenge in Science and Engineering, ASAP*. www.bestworkforce.org/PDFdocs/BESTTalentImperativeFINAL.pdf

⁴ Society of Women Engineers. (February 2006). *General Position Statement on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education and the Need for a U.S. Technologically-Literate Workforce*. societyofwomenengineers.swe.org/images/stories/SWE_STEM_Education_Statement.pdf