March 3, 2016

Dear Representative:

On behalf of more than 170,000 bipartisan members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I urge you to co-sponsor the Women and Minorities in STEM Booster Act of 2016 and support women and minorities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

AAUW’s report, Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, found that girls’ academic achievement and interest in math and science are negatively impacted by certain environmental and social barriers – including stereotypes and gender bias. AAUW’s follow-up report, Solving the Equation: The Variables for Women’s Success in Engineering and Computing, shows that despite early similarities between girls and boys in math and science achievement, by high school, boys are more likely than girls to take the standardized exams most closely associated with the fields of engineering and computing. Among first-year college students, women are much less likely than men to say that they intend to major in engineering or computing. When women are not well represented in these fields, they lose out on high-quality job opportunities. Their absence also exacerbates the country’s critical economic need for a high-skilled qualified workforce.

The STEM Booster Act takes a meaningful and substantive step towards the educational and economic goal of attracting and retaining women and underrepresented minorities in STEM fields. It would create competitive grants to improve access to opportunities in STEM fields through online workshops, mentoring program, internships, outreach programs and additional training for faculty. Programming funded by the grants would be targeted towards women and girls, underrepresented minorities, and individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

AAUW’s research shows this type of intervention works. Since 1998, AAUW has helped change girls’ lives through Tech Trek, an experiential summer camp designed to pique the interest of rising eighth-grade girls in STEM. A 2013 survey of Tech Trek alumnae who attended the camp in California between 2006 and 2009 demonstrates the program’s lasting effects on many levels, including interest and confidence in STEM fields, decision to pursue STEM curricula, and future career plans. For example, 91 percent of girls reported that Tech Trek boosted their self-confidence in their ability to be successful in science classes, and 78 percent said the same for math classes.

Members interested in co-sponsorship are urged to contact Chris Gorud in Representative Carolyn Maloney’s office. Cosponsorship and votes associated with these issues may be
included in the AAUW Action Fund Congressional Voting Record. If you need additional information, feel free to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Erin Prangley, associate director of government relations, at 202/785-7730.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Maatz
Vice President for Government Relations