NCHER Legislative and Leadership Conference  
February 6-8, 2023  
The Westin Washington, DC City Center

Program Agenda  
(Draft as of December 1, 2022)

Monday, February 6, 2023

7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Registration Open

8:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. NCHER Board of Directors Meeting
The NCHER Board will meet to receive reports from the Chair, Treasurer, and President on the organization’s advocacy, communications, and regulatory strategies. The meeting is open to all members of NCHER.

12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m. Bootcamp on NCHER’s Advocacy Priorities for 2023
NCHER has developed a comprehensive list of advocacy priorities geared toward improving federal student aid and private loan programs for students and families. During this session, the NCHER staff will hold a bootcamp for its members to discuss the policy and political environment and review NCHER’s Advocacy Priorities for 2023 in advance of Capitol Hill and Agency visits.

12:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. NCHER Members Hold Capitol Hill and Agency Visits
NCHER members are reminded to take this time to make appointments with their Congressional delegations, especially members of the House Education and Labor Committee and Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, to talk about their advocacy priorities for 2023. The NCHER staff is available to help members make appointments with House and Senate staff.

5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Welcome Reception

Tuesday, February 7, 2023

7:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Registration Open
7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. Breakfast

8:30 a.m. – 8:45 a.m. Welcome
The NCHER leadership will welcome members to the conference and briefly discuss the conference program for the day.

Speaker
Christiana Thornton, Chair
National Council of Higher Education Resources
President and Chief Executive Officer
New Hampshire Higher Education Assistance Foundation Network

8:45 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. Federal Update Impacting the Higher Education Finance Industry
It has been two years since the Biden Administration took office. Since then, the White House and U.S. Department of Education have extended the federal payment, interest, and collections pause put in place to assist borrowers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; announced a new federal student loan forgiveness program using waiver authority under the HEROES Act; announced the creation of a new Income-Driven Repayment Program; enacted borrower friendly changes to the federal student loan program such as revisions to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program and the borrower defense to repayment process; announced that it will allow defaulted borrowers to get a fresh start back into repayment; and issued Dear Colleague Letter GEN 21-03, which requires guaranty agencies to assign those loans that defaulted during the pandemic to the agency. Recently, the U.S. Department of Justice announced new guidance governing how its attorneys will implement the “undue hardship” standard for borrowers in bankruptcy. With the start of the new Congress, divided government is back. Republicans enjoy a small majority in the U.S. House of Representatives while Democrats have a similar slim majority in the U.S. Senate – leading most observers to wonder what higher education policy will get enacted this year. This session will provide an update on federal developments and the outlook as we begin 2023.

9:45 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. Break

10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. Higher Education Priorities in the 118th Congress
Members of the House Education and Labor Committee will discuss their higher education priorities for the 118th Congress, including ideas to improve federal and private student loan programs and college access and success initiatives.

10:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Higher Education Priorities in the 118th Congress
Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee will discuss their higher education priorities for the 118th Congress, including ideas to improve federal and private student loan programs and college access and success initiatives.
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Congressional Staff Panel on Higher Education Policy
With the recent election, there are major changes coming to the House and Senate. Republicans now lead the House Education and Labor Committee while Democrats and Republicans have new leadership on the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. During this session, Democratic and Republican Congressional staff will discuss their higher education priorities for the 118th Congress and whether there are consensus areas for enactment of improvements to the student aid programs.

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. Lunch Break

1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. Enrollment and Financial Aid Trends in Postsecondary Education
According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, higher education enrollment fell 2.7 percent in the fall of 2021, following a 2.5 percent drop in the preceding fall. These enrollment losses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic represent a two-year decline of 5.1 percent or 938,000 students since the fall of 2019. While undergraduate enrollment alone fell by 3.1 percent, freshmen enrollment stabilized following a decline in fall 2020, up about 0.4 percent or 8,100 students. This session will review recent research and reports on postsecondary education enrollment, discuss current and anticipated trends at the public and private institutional level, and explore the impact on federal student aid programs.

2:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Refreshment Break

2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. Viewpoint: Observations from College and University Leaders
Colleges and universities are on the front-line of working with students and families to ensure that they enroll in and then graduate from postsecondary education. As higher education and the workforce changes, colleges and universities must keep pace. In this session, college and university leaders will discuss what they are seeing on their campuses, including enrollment trends, and innovative approaches to create educational opportunities for a diverse student population to meet current and future workforce needs. The panel will provide perspectives on a range of current topics such as learner access, affordability, accountability, student outcomes, and value measures.

3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. Industry Viewpoint: Update on Federal Loan Forgiveness, Income-Driven Repayment, and Fresh Start
In August, the Biden Administration announced the creation of a new federal student loan forgiveness program that will provide $10,000 to borrowers with federally held loans ($20,000 to borrowers who received a Pell Grant during their postsecondary education). Several states are currently challenging the loan forgiveness scheme, arguing that it is outside the scope of the HEROES Act. In conjunction with the federal loan
forgiveness plan, the U.S. Department of Education proposed the creation of a new income-driven repayment plan geared toward helping all borrowers repay their student loans, though some experts have criticized the agency for further complicating the already-byzantine federal student aid program. Last year, the Department also announced that it would allow defaulted borrowers with federally held loans to get a “fresh start” back into repayment, though details have been sparse on how such an initiative will be implemented. In this session, a panel of experts will discuss student loan reform at the federal level and what they mean for borrowers and taxpayers.

4:30 p.m. Conference Adjourns

Wednesday, February 8, 2023

7:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Registration Open

7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. Breakfast

8:30 a.m. – 8:45 a.m. Welcome
The NCHER leadership will welcome members to the conference and briefly discuss the conference program for the day.

Speaker
James P. Bergeron, President
National Council of Higher Education Resources

8:45 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. Higher Education Priorities of the U.S. Department of Education
From preparing student and parent borrowers for the restart of repayment to enacting new regulations around borrower defense to repayment, gainful employment, and Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program to carrying out new requirements passed by Congress to share taxpayer information to simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, 2023 is sure to be a busy one for the U.S. Department of Education. During this session, a senior official will speak about the Department’s policies and priorities, including reforms to the federal student loan program.

9:45 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. Break/Hotel Check Out

10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Examining State Policy Impacting Higher Education Finance
Over the last year, numerous states have enacted new laws regulating private education loan programs on top of existing laws that require federal and private student loan servicers to obtain a license and meet competing requirements to protect borrowers. In this session, a panel of experts will discuss state consumer protection efforts impacting the higher education finance industry.
11:00 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.  New Developments Impacting Private Loan Programs
In October 2022, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) released the “Report of the CFPB Education Loan Ombudsman,” which provided an overview of the private student lending market, data and trends on consumer complaints, and recommendations to address risks and improve borrower outcomes. In this session, a senior official with the CFPB will speak about the Bureau’s policies and priorities around private education loans.

11:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  Conference Wrap Up and Closing Remarks

Speaker
James P. Bergeron, President
National Council of Higher Education Resources

12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.  NCHER Members Hold Capitol Hill and Agency Visits
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