



Higher Education at Risk - And How You Can Help Protect It

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AAUW Strategic Priorities:

Advancing Equity through
Higher Education
(2025 and Beyond).



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1. Fund Higher Education
 2. Remove Barriers to Success in Education and the Workplace
 3. Strengthen AAUW's Reach

Why Higher Education Matters for Women

- Higher education is one of the most powerful engines we have for economic security and mobility.
- A degree is still associated with higher earnings and more job stability.
- When higher education is under attack — when civil-rights protections are rolled back, when aid is slashed, when international students are targeted — **women's equality and economic security are under attack.**



Today's Focus

- Department of Education
- International students
- Civil Rights
- Cost & Affordability
- Defending Higher Education

Understanding the U.S. Department of Education

The U.S. Department of Education was created to do three things:

- **Enforce civil-rights laws in education** — including protections against race and sex discrimination and for students with disabilities;
- **Administer federal student aid** — Pell Grants, loans, and work-study — fairly and effectively; and
- **Promote equal educational opportunity for all students** — regardless of where they live or how much their family earns.

Cuts and Chaos



Official Statement



AAUW urges Congress to intervene and ensure that the Department of Education can do what the law requires it to do — protect students' civil rights and advance gender and racial equity in every classroom and on every campus.

— GLORIA L. BLACKWELL
Chief Executive Officer

Cuts and Chaos

- Staffing cuts at the Department of Education, including the Office of Civil Rights
- Students with discrimination complaints are left waiting; many are discouraged from reporting at all
- “Partnerships” that shift core work to other agencies, creating confusion and gaps in enforcement

The Challenges We Face

The Atlantic

Trump's Campaign to Scare Off Foreign Students

The administration's recent crackdown could have a powerful deterrent effect.

POLITICO

Education Department dismisses thousands of civil rights complaints at an 'unheard of' pace

The department has focused its civil rights efforts on stamping out campus antisemitism since Donald Trump returned to the White House.



Reconciliation Bill Would Block Access to Higher Ed, ACE Leader Warns

The head of the American Council on Education said the legislation would make higher ed more elite, while Trump's cuts to research funding risk the country's standing as a global superpower.

International Students

- Students blocked at the border
- Visas unobtainable
- Campus cutbacks closed doors
- Climate of fear

Civil Rights

- Rolling back disparate-impact protections
- Pressuring schools to dismantle diversity offices and “divisive concepts” teaching
- Threatening funding or nonprofit status to force ideological compliance
- These moves disproportionately harm: women, students of color, low-income, LGBTQ+, and disabled students

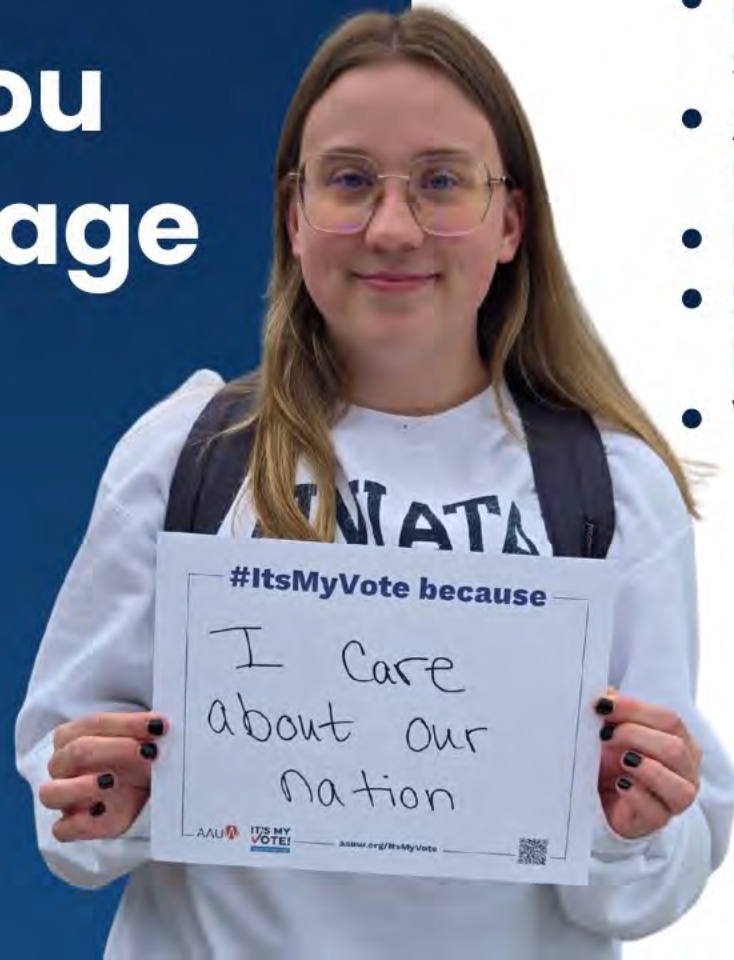
Budget Reconciliation

Instead of expanding access, it erects new barriers that will shut out millions — especially women, low-income families, and communities of color

The law:

- Slashes financial aid
- Eliminates vital student-loan programs
- Channels public dollars into private voucher schemes without strong civil-rights safeguards

How You Can Engage



- Participate in advocacy training series
- Attend our new quarterly Virtual Events and Policy Briefings
- Meet with your elected officials
- Support the Public Policy Fund & Defend Higher Education Fund
- Vote!

AAUW in Action



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AAUW Weighs In: Policy Updates

Letters, Comments, Testimony & Legal Briefs

Explore our letters, comments, testimony and legal briefs to learn more about AAUW's positions and advocacy efforts regarding education, economic security, and civil rights.

THE LATEST

[AAUW Letter Urging Senators to Oppose Brittany Panuccio's Nomination as a Commissioner for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(EEOC\) \(9/10/25\)](#)

[Coalition Comment Letter Opposing the U.S. Department of Education's Proposed Changes to the Civil Rights Data Collection, Limiting the Ability of Schools' to Protect Vulnerable Children \(9/8/25\)](#)

[AAUW Letter Urging U.S. Representatives to Support the the Family And Medical Insurance Leave \(FAMILY\) Act \(9/4/25\)](#)

[Coalition Comment Letter Opposing the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Proposed Rule to Eliminate Comprehensive Pregnancy Options](#)

[Set of Negotiators During the Negotiated Rulemaking Process on Income-Driven Repayment Plans and Public Service Loan Forgiveness \(6/2/25\)](#)

[Coalition Letter to Congress Opposing Efforts to "Defund" Planned Parenthood Through the Reconciliation Process \(6/2/25\)](#)

[Coalition Letter to Senate Finance Committee Opposing Any Efforts to Create a Nationwide Private School Voucher Program such as the Educational Choice for Children Act \(ECCA; H.R.833 / S.292\) \(5/30/25\)](#)

[Coalition Letter Urging Appropriators to Robustly Fund the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs \(OFCCP\) \(5/12/25\)](#)



Defend Equity.
Demand Inclusion.
Take Action.



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