



March 15, 2022

Speaker Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Majority Leader Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader Mitch McConnell  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510  
*Transmitted to policy staff via email*

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader Schumer and Leader McConnell:

The [Society of Women Engineers \(SWE\)](#) is pleased that the House and Senate have passed bipartisan competitiveness proposals. **As you and your colleagues prepare to negotiate differences between the House-passed America COMPETES Act and the Senate-passed United States Innovation and Competition Act, SWE writes to share its perspective on various provisions of the two bills.**

With over 40,000 members globally, SWE advocates for public policies that promote equity in research and the classroom, foster excellence and access to quality opportunities in the workforce and ensure that women and girls graduating high school and college leave with the skills and knowledge that support their professional, academic and personal aspirations. The competitiveness legislation you are considering is crucial to this work.

SWE recognizes that the thousands of pages of legislative text involved in the House-Senate negotiations address myriad issues important to national security, the country's economy, the STEM workforce, and the research enterprise. Both proposals reflect an evolution of the National Science Foundation (NSF). Increasing the federal investment in NSF is essential to ensuring that the US maintains its global leadership in economic competitiveness, innovation, and national security. **The work done at the Foundation is crucial to the present and future STEM workforce. SWE particularly supports efforts to broaden participation in science and STEM fields.**

In addition, the bill includes various proposals to invest in and strengthen STEM education. Research has shown time and again that exposure to STEM subjects in elementary school is crucial to nurturing interest in them among

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females and students of color. We know that teacher preparation programs often produce elementary teachers who are uncomfortable teaching science and STEM subjects. **We appreciate the provisions of the bills that seek to improve teacher preparation and grow a qualified STEM teaching workforce, as well as those that expose students to hands-on STEM learning, computer science, high-quality STEM coursework, apprenticeships and varied pathways to the STEM workforce.**

### **Supporting and Protecting Women in STEM Fields**

For several congresses, SWE has joined allies in the STEM advocacy community to support enactment of the STEM Opportunities Act (HR 204/S 2224). SWE is pleased elements of it are in both bills. However, the House-passed bill's Title V includes stronger provisions on this count than the Senate bill. It addresses the importance of collecting data on who receives federal research grants. It acknowledges the cultural and institutional barriers to expanding the academic and federal STEM workforce. It also invests in rural STEM education research and STEM efforts at minority-serving institutions.

Subtitle D of Title V of the America COMPETES Act includes the Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act (HR 2695/S 1379). SWE feels strongly that the House provisions are much stronger than the Senate-passed bill's provisions related to efforts to address sexual harassment and gender harassment in the STEM fields by supporting research regarding such harassment and efforts to prevent and respond to such harassment. The Senate should recede to the House on these provisions. **A compromise bill should preserve Title V of the America COMPETES Act in its entirety.**

### **Supporting the STEM RESTART Act**

While neither competitiveness proposal includes the STEM RESTART Act (HR 2784/S 1297), SWE thinks a final bill should. The bipartisan bill would establish a new national program to support mid-career workers reentering the STEM workforce, including workers from underrepresented or rural populations, by awarding grants to certain small- and medium-sized businesses to assist such workers in reentering the workforce at positions above entry level. The pandemic has disproportionately affected women in STEM fields, and this bill is more important than ever to those women and the needs of the country's STEM workforce. **SWE feels strongly that the STEM RESTART Act should be included in the final negotiated competitiveness bill.**

It is clear that jobs in the STEM fields must be filled substantially by women to meet the country's economic and infrastructure goals. Enabling women and girls to compete in the global economy requires a strong federal

commitment to improved access to quality teaching and learning in the STEM fields, as well as leadership at the federal research agencies that recognizes the contributions of female STEM professionals. The competitiveness legislation will be important to ensuring that females are encouraged to pursue STEM fields, protected in their work and supported in their academic and professional aspirations. SWE looks forward to working with you and your colleagues on our mutual goals.

If you have any questions about SWE's perspective on the provisions of the House and Senate competitiveness proposals, please do not hesitate to contact Della Cronin, SWE's Washington Representative at [dcronin@bosepublicaffairs.com](mailto:dcronin@bosepublicaffairs.com).

Thank you for your attention to these views.

Sincerely,



Karen Horting, MBA, CAE  
Executive Director & CEO  
Society of Women Engineers

cc: House Science, Space and Technology Committee  
Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee  
House Education and Labor Committee  
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee