

# **Respond, Innovate, Support, and Empower (RISE) Act**

## **Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici and Congressman Larry Bucshon, M.D.**

### Background:

Public elementary, middle, and high schools are required to identify and evaluate students with disabilities, and students with disabilities are guaranteed a free appropriate public education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Approximately 13 percent of elementary and secondary students receive special education services.

When students with disabilities enroll in higher education, they encounter a different process for receiving special education services. Although students with disabilities at higher education institutions are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, colleges and universities are not obligated to identify students with disabilities or offer evaluations. Students must voluntarily inform institutions of their disability and provide documentation to qualify for disability services. Often, colleges and universities request an updated evaluation by a medical professional, which can cost students and families thousands of dollars. After students demonstrate proof of a disability, higher education institutions work with students to develop accommodations.

The transition to higher education can be challenging for students with disabilities and their families. According to the National Council on Disability, only about one-third of students with disabilities who enroll in four-year programs earn a degree within eight years.

### Summary of the RISE Act:

The RISE Act will help address the challenges students with disabilities face as they transition to higher education through the following provisions:

1. The RISE Act allows students with disabilities to use a variety of existing documentation—such as a 504 plan, individualized education program (IEP), and an accommodation plan from another higher education institution—as proof of a disability, saving students and families money and simplifying access to accommodations. Colleges and universities will continue to work with students to determine which accommodations are needed.
2. The RISE Act requires higher education institutions to disseminate clear information to students and families about their processes for providing accommodations, and it requires institutions to report more complete data about students with disabilities, including the number of students with disabilities who receive accommodations and earn a certificate or degree. This information will help students and families decide where to apply to college and how to navigate the process for receiving accommodations.
3. The RISE Act authorizes \$10 million for the National Center for Information and Technical Support for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities. The technical assistance center is currently funded through a broader authorization and has received only about \$2.5 million in recent years. The center provides essential information to students about their rights and responsibilities in higher education and how to access accommodations. The center also helps higher education instructors adopt best practices for supporting students with disabilities.

### Supporting Organizations:

The National Center for Learning Disabilities; AIM Institute for Learning and Research; American Association of Community Colleges; American Association of People with Disabilities; American Association of State Colleges and Universities; American Council on Education; Association of American Universities; Association of Public and Land-grant Universities; Association of University Centers on Disabilities; Autistic Self Advocacy Network; Decoding Dyslexia Network; Eye to Eye; Higher Education Consortium for Special Education; Learning Disabilities Association of America; National Alliance on Mental Illness; National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities; National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities; National Down Syndrome Congress; Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children; The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates