

October 17, 2018

Senator Richard Blumenthal
706 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Senator Richard J. Durbin
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Senator Sherrod Brown
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Senator Elizabeth Warren
317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senators:

Thank you for your letter seeking clarity concerning the status of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation's (CHEA) recognition of the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS).

CHEA is a nongovernmental membership organization of degree-granting colleges and universities that provides coordination of accreditation throughout the United States. As part of this work, CHEA reviews accrediting organizations based on the standards it has established in the *CHEA Recognition Policy and Procedures*. At present, CHEA recognizes 60 of these bodies. At the heart of this recognition is respect for institutional mission and autonomy, with a longstanding commitment to rigorous peer review as the most effective means of judging academic quality. The success of peer review – professionals reviewing professionals – has been central to the enormous success and regard for U.S. higher education for many years.

While CHEA has great respect for the political process, its judgments concerning accrediting organizations are driven first and foremost by assuring and improving quality in higher education on this model of commitment to mission and peer review, not political process or political influence. CHEA is proud that the importance of its recognition has been acknowledged by students, employers, many states and the international community.

The CHEA policy and standards differ considerably from the recognition standards of the U.S. Department of Education. This is by design. The primary goal of federal recognition is to assure that accrediting organizations are reliable authorities on the quality of education and training for the purpose of access to federal funds. CHEA standards focus primarily on how well accrediting organizations are instrumental in strengthening academic quality and fidelity to mission in colleges and universities. In addition, CHEA's recognition review and decision making does not address the requirements of federal, state or other, nongovernmental bodies that may review accrediting organizations. Nor does CHEA seek to influence the decisions of other recognizing bodies.

We have attached two public documents to assist in describing CHEA's recognition work and, specifically, our activity with ACICS. These are the *2010 CHEA Recognition Policy and Procedures* under which ACICS has been most recently reviewed and the *CHEA Recognition Decision Summary* for ACICS.

ACICS was recognized by CHEA in September of 2012 for a three-year period. ACICS submitted a new application for recognition during 2015 and 2016. This application has been under advisement since that time. On November 13, 2017, CHEA wrote to ACICS affirming that the organization's recognition remained under advisement by CHEA and that, upon approval of a revised CHEA *Recognition Policy*, ACICS was to undergo a new, full recognition review, superseding the review that had been underway using the 2010 version of the policy. This is the letter that ACICS has made public and it is attached as well.

CHEA's Board of Directors approved the revised *Recognition Policy and Procedures* in September 2018 after extensive public comment from a variety of constituents. The policy is to be effective January 1, 2019. CHEA will be providing guidance to ACICS to submit an application for recognition under the new policy in early 2019. We expect to have the revised policy available to accreditors and the public within the next 4-6 weeks.

Please contact me with any additional questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Judith Falon
President

Attachments: 2010 CHEA *Recognition Policy and Procedures*
CHEA *Recognition Decision Summary* for ACICS
November 13, 2017 CHEA Letter to ACICS