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AFFORDABLE TEXTBOOK LEGISLATION MOVES FORWARD

BATON ROUGE, La. – Senate Education Committee members today advanced Board of Regents’ sponsored legislation, Senate Bill (SB) 117, aimed at increasing college affordability through open education resources. Student leaders testified with Commissioner of Higher Education Kim Hunter Reed sharing how high textbook costs have impacted their college experience and the experience of their fellow students.

SB 117 directs Regents to continue developing and implementing plans to increase the acquisition, availability, and accessibility of affordable textbooks as well as other open educational resources to lower overall student costs. Additionally, cost transparency for students is addressed in the bill by requiring campuses to clearly mark courses that use low-or no-cost course materials so those registering for classes can make informed choices.

“A significant portion of my student debt came from textbooks and access codes for my classes,” said Nicholls State University Student Government Association (SGA) President Austin Wendt. “In fact, for my general education courses, the cost was upward of \$800.00 and it made me consider whether college was a viable option for me financially.”

“The issue of affordable textbooks for first-year students and first-generation students is significant,” said Louisiana State University SGA President William Jewell. “A lot of the focus needs to be on entry-level classes and our SGA has focused on making textbooks available in our library for everyone to use as one way we’ve approached this challenge.”

“When I saw the price of a textbook, I was like wow, this is a down payment for

a car,” said Board of Regents Student Member Anthony Kenney from Southern University. “We are failing our students if we don’t increase the resources available for things like books.”

“Our job is to listen to students and two days ago I had a friend tell me she had a scholarship for tuition and fees, but had to pull out a student loan just to pay for textbooks. It shouldn’t be like that,” said LSU of Alexandria SGA President Ricky Brazzel.

To address these challenges, the Board of Regents and the Louisiana Library Network (LOUIS) have made strategic investments resulting in more than 50,000 new eBooks being added to college and university library collections. Students are able to access these materials online and download them without restriction or cost. Higher education representatives report nearly 90,000 of the state’s more than 200,000 college students have benefited from these initial efforts, since 2012.

SB 117 expands these efforts and acknowledges the important collaborative work going on across the state’s campuses. The legislation mirrors best practices in other states including Georgia, Oregon, New York and California. As students enroll in low and no-cost courses states have seen campuses and faculty move away from high-cost materials, reducing the burden on students and increasing both retention and graduation rates. The bill next goes to the full Senate for consideration.

The Senate Education Committee also approved Regents’ Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR) 42 creating a work-based learning task force, authored by Conrad Appel. The goal of the legislation is to address workforce shortages and better prepare students for a 21st-century economy. The Workforce-Based Learning Task Force will be driven by industry and will evaluate existing programs, develop a framework that sustains industry engagement, encourage partnerships between employers and education providers, and coordinate efforts across agencies as well as funding streams.

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