APWA Coalition Wins

Prepared for APWA Member Organizations | August 2026

Since its formation, the Advanced Professional Workforce Alliance has built a record of tangible policy and communications wins in defense of graduate professional degree programs threatened by the Department of Education's RISE final rule. The following highlights represent key milestones from the coalition's advocacy efforts.

RISE NPRM Comment Letter

APWA submitted a formal comment letter in response to the Department of Education's RISE Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (Docket No. ED-2025-OPE-0944) by the March 2, 2026 deadline. The comment was co-signed by 34 organizations and argued that the proposed narrow professional degree definition would impermissibly limit access to elevated federal loan limits for students in programs that meet the functional criteria established under 34 CFR § 668.2.

FY 2027 Appropriations Language Adopted

The House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee adopted report language in its FY 2027 bill report aligned with APWA. The adopted language:

- **Directs ED to report** on enrollment and completion trends in programs excluded from the "professional degree" designation.
- **Mandates stakeholder consultation** with institutions of higher education and professional associations to gather qualitative input on regulatory impact
- **Recommends a process for designating additional programs** as professional based on training requirements, regulatory structure, and workforce need

Congressional Briefing with American Institute of Architects: "The RISE and Fall of Graduate Access"

On June 8, 2026, APWA and AIA hosted a Congressional briefing at the Rayburn House Office Building (Room 2168) titled *"The RISE and Fall of Graduate Access."* The event brought together representatives from seven APWA member organizations to present directly to congressional staff on the impact of the RISE rule's narrowed professional degree definition. The offices of Sen. Merkley (D-OR) and Rep. Torres (D-NY) participated in the event.

Panelists represented:

- American Institute of Architects (AIA)
- Association of Naturopathic Medical Colleges (AANMC)/American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP)
- National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)
- American Physical Therapy Association (APTA)
- Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH)

- National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA)/Association for Athletic Training Education (AATE)
- Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA)

Media Coverage: Inside Higher Ed

Inside Higher Ed featured APWA coalition leaders in a February 2026 article on the growing pushback against the RISE rule's narrow professional degree definition (*"Health Care Groups Form Coalition to Fight Loan Caps"*).

Resources Produced for the Coalition

APWA developed and distributed a comprehensive suite of advocacy and communications resources for member organizations, including:

- **Legislative comparison one-pager** covering bills in the 119th Congress addressing the graduate/professional degree distinction
- **Congressional briefing materials** including panelist scripts with individualized talking points, event invitations, and RSVP infrastructure
- **Constituent mobilization ask** with guidance for member organizations on engaging their networks
- **Social media toolkit** with sample posts, graphics, and hashtag guidance for coordinated coalition messaging
- **Litigation and regulatory monitoring summaries** tracking ED's interim guidance and related court developments

For questions or to request any of these materials, visit **https://apwa.lewis-burke.com/**.