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## **ACICS Notifies CHEA of Voluntary Withdraw of Application for Recognition, Citing Significant Concerns Regarding Process and Implementation of New Policies**

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The Board of the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS) notified the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) today that it has voted to voluntarily withdraw its pending application for recognition by CHEA effective immediately.

“I am fully confident that the information submitted to date by ACICS makes clear that we currently satisfy any reasonable interpretation of CHEA’s standards,” said Michelle Edwards, ACICS President. “Our decision to withdraw is based instead on our significant concerns related to the CHEA accreditation process and its ongoing implementation of several new policies. We have raised many questions with CHEA throughout the process, and too many of them remain unanswered to provide a reasonable level of comfort that ACICS will receive a full and fair review. To be clear, given the importance of the CHEA recognition process, we have every intention of reapplying at a later date, when we hope we will benefit from a fuller transition by CHEA to its new rules and processes for petition review.”

As background, in November 2016 and March 2017, the CHEA Committee on Recognition recommended to the CHEA Board of Directors that ACICS be granted recognition for up to three years based on its full compliance with the recognition criteria. In both instances, despite the Committee’s recommendation, the CHEA Board of Directors returned the recommendation to the Committee for reconsideration. Then, in November 2017, CHEA notified ACICS that it would require the agency to submit a new application for recognition under revised CHEA recognition standards, which would not be implemented until 2019. ACICS submitted its application on March 1, 2019 and received notification on December 16, 2019 that the Committee was recommending ACICS recognition be denied, citing noncompliance with nine standards. ACICS submitted its response on January 15, 2020 in accordance with CHEA policy that allows for a response within 30 days.

In its withdrawal notification letter to CHEA, ACICS cited several ongoing and unaddressed concerns with the new CHEA accreditation process and its implementation of several new policies. It is worth noting that CHEA has only very recently revised its standards and has not undertaken any recognition reviews under its new standards.

Throughout the process, CHEA has provided little substantive feedback to ACICS inquiries regarding how it interprets its new and revised standards, prompting concerns regarding whether ACICS was receiving the benefit of a full and fair review. For example, on December 11, 2018 already recognized agencies, including ACICS, were provided a copy of CHEA’s

*Transition Framework for Currently Recognized Accrediting Organizations*, which permitted agencies additional time to provide evidence of compliance for certain new or revised standards. Despite three separate attempts to clarify whether the Transition Framework applied to the ACICS review, ACICS never received a clear answer and was not permitted to provide supplementary evidence after the March 1, 2019 submission.

Additionally, ACICS has significant concerns regarding CHEA's internal processes in reviewing ACICS's recognition application, specifically whether CHEA staff and Board sufficiently reviewed documents submitted by ACICS. ACICS first submitted its narrative and exhibits on March 1, 2019, but was only notified on January 13, 2020 – 48 hours before the January 15 deadline – that CHEA may not have had access to all ACICS supporting documentation at all phases of its review, despite multiple submissions of that evidence through a variety of means at CHEA's request.

“We do not expect CHEA to agree with the procedural issues we have raised here, but given the importance of the CHEA recognition process to us, it is in our best interest to proceed when our Board has greater confidence that our agency will receive a full and fair review,” said Edwards. “By delaying our recognition application to a later date, we will benefit from a fuller transition by CHEA to its new rules and processes for petition review.”

[ACICS Letter to CHEA](#)

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