

March 18, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell, and Leader Schumer:

As new cases of COVID-19 exposure and infection arise every day, many of the nation's institutions of higher education are suspending or moving classes online to do what's best for the public health and to [flatten the curve](#) of the virus's spread. However, these sudden campus closures—whether they are fully closing a campus or moving all classes to virtual and restricting campus access to respond to the real health issues we are facing—are having a secondary negative impact on many of today's students. Reports of vulnerable students who may be reliant on their campus for more than just a place to attend lectures are highlighting just how critical access to a dining hall, food pantry, or other accessible food sources; work-study wages; or reliably safe and stable campus housing can be.

Now, more than ever, today's students need federal policy that reflects the lives they actually live. Almost one-quarter of students is a parent who may rely on their college's on-campus child care center or other community partners, both of which are likely to be impacted. And, eighty-one percent of part-time students are employed and potentially contributing chunks of their paychecks to their family's budget back home. In the face of this emergency, these realities become even more pressing, and more urgent to center in any immediate or future policymaking.

Democrats and Republicans have been swift and thoughtful in their response thus far, and must continue to show consideration of the many challenges that will be facing our country and our students. We also are aware of the current flexibility provided to federal agencies to address the needs of today's students. However, the current responses and existing flexibilities do not address all of the problems that we will see in the coming weeks and months. To respond to these present and future challenges we urge Congress to include the following proposals in the final COVID-19 package:

- Allow for direct emergency funds to cover basic needs. Many students struggled to cover costs for food, housing, transportation, and child care, even before the COVID-19

outbreak and subsequent campus closures. Congress should consider ways to support students through emergency aid, such as allowing institutions to directly provide resources to students.

- Allow for flexibility with the Pell Grant Lifetime Eligibility Usage. Students and administrators have little clarity on how suspension of classes will affect the number of semesters they are eligible to receive a Pell Grant. Congress should make clear that usage of Pell in any semester where a student is impacted by COVID-19 should not count toward a student's lifetime limits.
- Ensure no penalty to a student's Satisfactory Academic Progress status. Students' class and instruction time will likely dip over the next few weeks or months. Congress should consider allowing for flexibility in students' ability to access Title IV if they dip below satisfactory academic progress requirements.

Today's students have always needed a system that is flexible, affordable and responsive to their needs. In the face of this pandemic, we urge Congress to move swiftly in a bipartisan manner to do what's best for today's students and the public health at large.

Sincerely,

Higher Learning Advocates
10,000 Degrees
America Forward
Association of Big Ten Students
Beyond 12
Bipartisan Policy Center Action
Braven
Breakthrough Central Texas
Campaign for College Opportunity
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Public Policy Priorities
Citizen Schools
COABE
Code2040
CollegeSpring
Complete College America
Cornell Student Assembly
Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)
DVP-PRAXIS LTD
exalt Youth
Excelencia in Education
Eye to Eye National
Generation Citizen
Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice

iMentor
Institute for Higher Education Policy
Institute for Women's Policy Research
Jobs for the Future (JFF)
LaborX
Latino U College Access
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National College Attainment Network
National Skills Coalition
OneGoal
Single Stop
St. Louis Graduates
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
Student Veterans of America
Students United
The Education Trust
The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)
The Opportunity Network
Third Way
Transcend
uAspire
University of California Student Association
UPCEA
Veterans Education Success
Wyman
Year Up
Young Invincibles