



## **uAspire Calls on Congress for Additional COVID-19 Relief for Postsecondary Students**

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The dual threat of an unprecedented health crisis and economic recession have changed millions of college students' financial status virtually overnight. Campus closures due to COVID-19 have exacerbated financial strain and inequities postsecondary students face to meet their educational costs and basic needs.

As the weeks unfold, uAspire's advising work offers insight into the ongoing needs postsecondary students face during and beyond the coronavirus pandemic. uAspire's policy team is actively working with Congressional offices to advance student-centered solutions in the next package of coronavirus relief. We believe it is essential to prioritize pragmatic, on-the-ground support to students to help them weather this storm and continue their education.

Our policy recommendations below map out immediate needs for legislative and agency action paired with potential solutions in three areas: basic needs security; financial stability; and financial aid access. uAspire stands ready to advance these policies to help ensure *all* students, regardless of financial circumstances, successfully meet their needs and persist in college despite the pandemic.

### **BASIC NEEDS SECURITY**

<b>Student Needs</b>	<b>Recommended Solutions</b>
<b>Emergency aid to cover full range of expenses due to school closures</b>	<p>The Higher Education Act's definition of cost of attendance is outdated and does not represent the full scope of costs students face. The Department of Education (ED) should provide explicit guidance to ensure Education Stabilization funds are distributed quickly and easily with equity in mind for students from low income backgrounds and students of color.</p> <p>Congress must ensure emergency aid is made available to cover all related non-tuition costs beyond the limited definition of "qualified educational expenses" to address complete scope of living and educational costs including transportation/moving costs, utilities, technology, and dependent care.</p>
<b>Unable to access to food assistance due to work requirements</b>	<p>Eliminate work eligibility and requirements for college students to allow low-income students who lost or cannot get employment to access SNAP food assistance and other public benefits programs such as TANF for students who are parents.</p>

<p><b>Lack of quality access to tech and high-speed internet for students from low-income households</b></p>	<p>Increase federal funding and offer new flexibilities to the E-Rate program to allow for the purchase and dissemination of internet-enabled laptops and high-speed Wi-Fi devices directly to students from low-income households. Funding should not only be dedicated to K12 low-income districts but also include state systems of higher education with priority given to Pell-eligible students.</p> <p>Improve access to the Lifeline program by allowing auto-eligibility to Pell-eligible students to receive services through the program. Increase appropriations to the Lifeline program that provide a higher dollar amount for services covered, including broadband.</p>
<p><b>DACA/TPS students are left out of crisis relief</b></p>	<p>Congress must protect DACA/TPS students and ensure their eligibility for critical stimulus relief and institutional emergency aid. DACA/TPS students serve as essential workers across the country with employment authorization provided by the federal government, and tax payments via ITIN. They should not be further penalized for engaging in higher ed and the nation's economy under programs and protections outlined in the law.</p>

### FINANCIAL STABILITY

<p><b>Student Needs</b></p>	<p><b>Recommended Solutions</b></p>
<p><b>Postsecondary students lack access to stimulus checks</b></p>	<p>Include 18 to 24-year-old postsecondary students as eligible for stimulus checks. Many college students could be claimed as dependent on parent taxes yet live independently. This includes students with their own children.</p> <p>Urge Treasury to apply the definition of dependents which includes personal exemption and covers college students. Extend at least \$500 for college students and other dependents ages 17-24.</p>
<p><b>Student workers unable to access unemployment benefits</b></p>	<p>Expand the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PAU) program to provide benefits to student workers, including those whose place of employment remains open but had to move amidst campus closures. Include those seeking employment for the first time, especially college seniors who are graduating into an unprecedented economic recession.</p>

<p><b>Risk of public institutions' escalating costs placed on students due to state budget shortfalls</b></p>	<p>Prioritize significantly investing in states over individual institutions of higher education. This is critical to stabilize public higher education budgets which provide for public systems' operational costs and need-based student financial aid. Include a Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirement to dissuade cuts to per student levels once state revenue returns to pre-pandemic levels.</p> <p>The formula should ensure financial support is prioritized for institutions serving the highest number of Pell Grant and need-based state aid recipients. These public, less-selective institutions tend to be lower-resourced and yet serve the majority of students from low-income backgrounds and students of color.</p>
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### FINANCIAL AID ACCESS

Student Needs	Recommended Solutions
<p><b>FAFSA/ Title IV Verification flexibility</b></p>	<p>Insist that the Department of Education provide flexibility to meet Title IV verification requirements for the 20-21 academic year by allowing financial aid offices to accept alternate methods of documentation and signatures. New and returning students' financial aid packages are being held-up by verification requirements still demanding in-person signatures and forms from shuttered government offices.</p>
<p><b>Simple and transparent process to determine updated financial aid eligibility given volatile household financial status</b></p>	<p>As part of oversight responsibilities, Congress should task the Secretary to issue new guidance on professional judgement. It is critical to streamline the process for financial aid officers and families alike. More students than ever need clear communication and simple steps for accessing financial aid to meet their circumstances and advance their education.</p>
<p><b>Protect Pell for students whose needs have increased as a result of the pandemic</b></p>	<p>Increase the Pell grant amount to allow students from low-income backgrounds to still be able to access postsecondary education despite increased financial needs due to COVID19. Protect the Pell surplus to provide for the anticipated increase of low-income students who need a path to economic mobility in the post-coronavirus economy.</p>
<p><b>Not all federally-held student loans are eligible for borrower relief</b></p>	<p>Include Perkins loans and privately-held FFEL (fed) loans in legislative relief provisions for student borrowers.</p>