



February 19, 2020

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
2358B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
United States Senate
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
United States Senate
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs DeLauro and Blunt and Ranking Members Cole and Murray,

We write on behalf of the Student Aid Alliance to thank you for your efforts in support of the student aid programs in the FY 2020 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Act. Under your leadership, your committees provided significant increases for the programs that help low- and middle-income students access and succeed in postsecondary education. In a time when bipartisan agreements often seem hard to reach, we were extremely grateful for the way you and your members continued the tradition of strong bipartisan support for federal student aid.

As you begin to work on the FY 2021 appropriations process, we ask that you carry this commitment forward. We ask that the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations subcommittee receive its fair allocation from the increased caps for FY 2021, and that student aid funding remain a high priority in this bill that funds so many important initiatives.

The specific funding levels identified below are intended to ensure that programs reach a level of funding consistent with what appropriators have provided in the past. The benefits of restoring funding in this manner are clear and direct. Enabling students to pursue postsecondary education has significant benefits for our country as a whole. A better-

educated workforce means a stronger economy with lower unemployment, greater earnings, and less need for social services. A real effort to build our economy requires a vigorous postsecondary education component.

To that end, our members request at least the following FY 2021 appropriation levels for student aid programs:

Pell Grants: The Pell Grant maximum should be increased to at least \$7,000. The Pell Grant program is the single most important tool to enable low-income students to afford college. CBO estimates nearly 7.5 million students will use Pell Grants in the coming academic year to finance their education. With the expiration of the automatic inflation adjustment for the Pell Grant maximum, we encourage you to continue to provide sufficient discretionary funding to ensure the neediest students do not fall further behind.

Had the Pell Grant maximum award simply kept pace with inflation from FY1975 (the first year the program served the majority of undergraduates), the award level would be \$6,810 in FY21. Beyond keeping up with inflation, Congress need to provide an increase in the Pell Grant maximum to strengthen its purchasing power for low-income students.

We strongly encourage the subcommittees to avoid rescinding appropriations from the Pell Grant program reserve. Using Pell Grant funding for other programs in the Labor-HHS-Education bill puts the future stability of the program in jeopardy. With numerous economic projections of a pending economic downturn, it would be disastrous to undercut Pell funding only to see costs soar in the short-term. The same situation occurred in the years following the Great Recession when participation in Pell Grants surged and cuts to benefits and eligibility were made to restrain costs. These changes resulted in hundreds of thousands of students being pushed out of the program. To avoid this happening again, we strongly urge your committees to preserve Pell funding within the program.

Campus-Based Aid: The campus-based aid programs are critical components of federal student aid. These programs have always required “skin in the game” from institutions by requiring a match from colleges to participate. The two main campus-based programs are the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG) and Federal Work-Study (FWS).

SEOG provides targeted, need-based grant aid of up to \$4,000 per student to 1.6 million students. Participating colleges match federal dollars to make more than \$1 billion in grant aid available. Over 99 percent of all SEOG recipients are Pell Grant recipients, and SEOG recipients have higher need on average than students receiving only Pell Grants. The FWS program provides federal and institutional funding to support part-time employment for more than 700,000 students to help them pay their college costs. Studies show that students who work on campus have higher graduation rates.

Over the last decade, both of these programs have seen level or reduced funding year after year, eroding their ability to serve low- and middle-income students.

We greatly appreciate the increase in funding for both programs in FY 2020, and want to work to reach our inflation adjusted goals. For SEOG, that would be \$1.052 billion and for FWS it would be \$1.467 billion. We urge you to consider the importance of restoring full funding for these programs and work towards that in FY 2021 appropriations.

TRIO: TRIO should be increased to \$1.150 billion. This increase would allow for strengthening the academic, financial, and cultural supportive services provided by TRIO;

and for a strong investment in TRIO's Educational Opportunity Centers and Talent Search programs. Each of these programs provides pre-college assistance for students who would become the first in their families to earn a college degree. The Talent Search program works with students in middle and high school to provide early exposure to the college and financial aid application processes. The Educational Opportunity Centers program focuses on providing counseling on college admissions to adult learners who want to enter or complete a program of postsecondary education.

A robust investment in TRIO will help ensure that low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities successfully persist in and graduate from postsecondary programs and make wise choices in financing their educations.

GEAR UP: GEAR UP should be funded at \$400 million. This increase would bring approximately 70,000 new students into the program and increase the overall number of students served to 700,000. GEAR UP has not had an open competition for Partnerships since 2018 and increased funding is needed to meet the high demand from new communities, states, and expiring grantees. GEAR UP has a proven track record of success in preparing students to enter and succeed in college.

Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN): Graduate education should be increased to at least \$35 million, the authorized level for the program. Additional increases towards \$48 million, the pre-sequester high water mark for funding graduate education in the humanities, adjusted for inflation, can be achieved over time. GAANN competitive grants offer support to top students studying in fields directly related to American competitiveness.

LEAP Grants: Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership grants should be funded at \$65 million. While this program has not been funded since FY 2011, it has not been repealed, and provides a strong federal-state partnership for states to increase their efforts to support need-based financial aid.

Thank you for considering our request. Without the strong partnership between the federal government, states, institutions, and families, millions of students would not be able to go to college. We call on Congress to continue its bipartisan support of federal student aid programs—which combine grants, work-study, and loan programs—to enable low- and middle-income students to succeed.

Sincerely,



Ted Mitchell
Co-chair



Barbara K. Mistick
Co-chair