



March 17, 2021

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 Patty Murray  
Chairman  
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

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  
Ranking Member  
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

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

On behalf of the Student Aid Alliance, we write to thank you for the increases provided for the student aid programs in the FY 2021 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Act. Under your leadership, your committees provided much needed funding 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 are extremely grateful for the continued tradition of strong bipartisan support for federal student aid.

As you begin to work on the FY 2022 appropriations process, we ask that you carry this commitment forward. Without statutory budget caps for FY 2022, we ask that the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations subcommittee receive a generous allocation to address the needs across all the agencies in its jurisdiction, and that student aid funding remain a high priority in the bill.

The nation has been reeling from the coronavirus pandemic for almost a year. Because of job losses, health crises and related uncertainties, low- and middle-income students face higher financial barriers to paying for college than before the pandemic. Student and family finances have drastically changed, with jobs lost and financial uncertainty causing students

to question if they can even pursue a higher education. Enrollment is down nationally, but especially among low-income and other underrepresented students. Next year will likely be worse, with applications for federal financial aid down nearly 10% over last year. As you know, this has been an extremely difficult year for all students, whether they have been in-person or virtual, at home or on campus. Because of these conditions, students have shown great need for support services to prepare for college, stay in college, and to persist to completion.

To help our nation's college students, we call on Congress to make bold investments in the federal student aid programs. The most direct way to improve college affordability is to enhance and expand successful programs. Not only is this an investment in students' futures, it is an investment in our country's economic recovery from the pandemic. With additional federal student aid, students will know they can pursue their higher education goals even in uncertain times.

**Pell Grants:** The Pell Grant maximum should be doubled to \$13,000. The Pell Grant program is the single most important tool to enable low-income students to afford college. Doubling Pell would restore much of the purchasing power the grant had in FY 1975, when the maximum Pell award covered 78% of the cost of attendance at a four-year public college. It now covers just 28%. While students use Pell Grants at all public and private nonprofit colleges and universities, the purchasing power at a four-year public has historically been the benchmark for its value.

Currently, nearly 7 million students use Pell Grants to finance their education. Doubling Pell would increase the number of eligible students, and would also lower the amount students need to borrow to pay for college.

With the upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pell Grant program in 2022, it would be remarkable for Congress to restore and rebuild the foundation on which the federal student aid programs are built. A generous Pell Grant, with additional grant aid matched by institutions in the form of SEOG, along with the student's involvement through Federal Work Study employment could reset the path to recovery post-pandemic for the future of American students.

With this in mind, we strongly encourage you to keep all Pell Grant reserve funding within the program, and not rescind it to fund other programs in the Labor-HHS-Education bill. Spending the reserve funds outside of Pell, rather than investing them back into the program, puts the future stability of Pell Grants in jeopardy. The economic impact of the pandemic has yet to be fully realized as students and families make difficult decisions about whether or not to pursue higher education, and ensuring that Pell Grants are stable will help ease a recovery.

**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 recently, and request additional funding towards our inflation adjusted goals. For SEOG, that would be \$1.061 billion and for FWS it would be \$1.48 billion. We urge you to consider the importance of restoring full funding for these programs in FY 2022 appropriations.

**TRIO:** TRIO should be increased to \$1.3164 billion. During the COVID crisis, students from high-poverty high schools had a plunge in college enrollment -- nearly one-third lower than the year before. Students in low-income families have been twice as likely to drop out of college as their wealthier peers during this crisis. Without TRIO's individualized supports, we may see a lost generation of promising students.

This increase for TRIO would allow for strengthening the academic, financial, and cultural supportive services provided by TRIO, and would expand to serve more than one million students. The increase will support the upcoming scheduled TRIO program competitions for FY22, including Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math-Science that provide intensive pre-college support for first-generation and low income high school students; Veterans Upward Bound supporting first-generation and low-income military veterans on the path to college; and the Ronald McNair Postbaccalaureate Program supporting low-income and minority undergraduates in entering and completing graduate school. The TRIO increase could also serve more students and programs in Student Support Services for undergraduate completion; Talent Search for middle and high school student college outreach; and Educational Opportunity Centers for low-income and unemployed adults

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 \$435 million. This increase would bring approximately 100,000 new students into the program and increase the overall number of students served to 623,000. Increased funding is needed to meet the high demand from new communities, states, and expiring grantees to apply for new GEAR UP awards. 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 \$35 million to reflect the need for increased investment. 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