



higher learning

ADVOCATES

Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee Addressing Funding for the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education for FY 2021

March 23, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

We are writing to express our support for increased funding for several key higher education programs that your subcommittee will debate as part of the ongoing Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 appropriations process. Higher Learning Advocates (HLA) is a non-profit advocacy organization working to shift federal policy from higher education to higher learning—education and training beyond high school that leads to a degree, credential, or employment. With more students participating in higher education than ever before, we strive to strengthen the connection between federal policy and the needs of today's students, employers, and communities. We advocate for federal policies and programs that create transparent pathways to success, incentivize innovation, protect students and taxpayers, and improve outcomes.

We understand that the COVID-19 national emergency is an evolving situation, and Congress is acting swiftly to address those needs. The asks below reflect the needs of today's students prior to the crisis, all of which will undoubtedly be greater and more urgent in this new environment.

We urge the subcommittee to make significant investments in key higher education and child care programs as part of the FY2021 appropriations process. These investments are critical if we are to advance policies to reflect the needs of today's students and encourage a system of higher learning that is affordable and responds to their current needs. Specifically, HLA is requesting \$7.7 billion in discretionary funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), \$200 million for the Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS) program, and \$10 million for the Open Textbooks Pilot Program. In addition, we strongly urge the Subcommittee to support and improve the Pell Grant program, leaving the current Pell Grant surplus untouched so it is available to fund future Pell needs.

The needs of today's students are changing. Recent data by the Institute for Women and Policy Research show that almost a quarter of college students are parents themselves. Access to high-quality, affordable, and accessible child-care can be a critical element to ensuring that a student is able to attend and complete higher education. HLA requests increasing discretionary funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to support all parents—including student parents—to \$7.7 billion. CCDBG is a federal program that provides State grants to help low-income student parents afford the cost of child-care services, so they can work, train for work, or attend school. Low-income parents, including student parents, greatly benefit from CCDBG funding, but even with increases in the FY2020 appropriations bill for this program, a large share of eligible children from low-income families do not receive child-care assistance. This funding boost is crucial to respond to these realities.

We also request increased funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS) program to \$200 million—the amount needed to provide child-care support to a little over two percent of Pell-eligible student parents of children ages 0-5. The CCAMPIS program provides vital support for the participation and success of low-income parents in postsecondary education through the provision of campus-based child-care, which is widely recognized as one of the most important supports for parenting college students. We are encouraged by the funding increase CCAMPIS received in FY2020 to \$53 million but in order to best serve today's students, CCAMPIS funding must continue to increase.

Additionally, we are encouraged by the \$2 million increase appropriated for the Open Textbooks Pilot program in FY2020 but we urge Congress to increase this federal investment to at least \$10 million in FY2021 appropriations to help institutions develop and utilize open educational resources. The cost of traditional textbooks is a burden for today's students—at community colleges, textbook costs can account for up to 80 percent of the cost of attendance. About 48 percent of Pell Grant recipients and 52 percent of underrepresented minorities said that open educational resources (OER) significantly impact their ability to afford college. Furthermore, in light of campus closures and moves to remote learning in response to COVID-19, students may become increasingly dependent on web-based resources. Federal investment in the Open Textbooks Pilot program will afford students better access to educational materials needed to succeed in postsecondary education.

Finally, we urge that as you consider funding for the Pell Grant program, you focus on supporting and improving the program; take action to continue inflation indexing to avoid further erosion of the Pell Grant's purchasing power; and look for ways to increase the maximum award to benefit today's students. Additionally, we urge that any portion of the current Pell Grant surplus is not rescinded or redirected toward any other priorities. Recent proposals have utilized

portions of the surplus to pay for other priorities, rather than keeping these funds within the Pell Grant program to pay for the eventual rise in program costs that the Congressional Budget Office and others predict for the program. Cutting the surplus will only hurt the long-term viability of the Pell Grant program, jeopardizing the critical role that Pell plays in financing the cost of a college education for low-income students. Rather than looking to the Pell Grant program to reduce the nation's deficit or pay for new projects, Congress should instead ensure that this critical feature of the program is retained so that there is not a funding crisis or reduction in future years.

Thank you for considering these requests. These important funding increases will ensure today's students, including student parents and individuals from underserved populations, are able to access and complete postsecondary education. Please contact us if we can be of any assistance.