

April 23, 2020

The Honorable Patty Murray
Labor, HHS, Education and Related
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Labor, HHS Education and Related
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Labor, HHS, Education and Related
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Labor, HHS Education and Related
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, Chair DeLauro, and Ranking Member Cole:

As you begin to work on the fiscal year (FY) 2022 appropriations process, Higher Learning Advocates would like to express our support for investments in key child care, higher education, and campus mental health programs. Specifically, we urge the inclusion of \$7.7 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), \$500 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 Subcommittees to provide sufficient funding that would allow the maximum Pell Grant to be doubled in the coming years. Lastly we urge \$15 million for the Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Grant to address growing campus suicide prevention and mental health needs.

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.

As the COVID-19 crisis continues past the one-year mark, many segments of our society, including today's postsecondary students, continue to be significantly impacted. Congress' swift action to address the needs of today's students through emergency student aid grants and broadband assistance through the Emergency Broadband Benefit program has been critical. Unfortunately, the ongoing needs remain. We urge the subcommittee to make significant investments in key childcare, higher education, and campus mental health programs as part of the FY22 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 responsive.

Recent data from 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. 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 FY21 appropriations bill for this program, a large share of eligible children from low-income families do not receive child-care assistance. HLA therefore urges an increase in discretionary funding for CCDBG to support all

parents—including student parents—to \$7.7 billion. This funding boost is crucial to respond to students' current realities.

We also request \$500 million in funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS)—the amount needed to provide child care support to about six 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 FY21 to \$55 million, but to best serve today's students, CCAMPIS needs a significant infusion of funds to meet current needs.

Additionally, we urge your Subcommittees to increase the Open Textbooks Pilot program to at least \$10 million in FY22 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.

We also urge that you increase funding for the Pell Grant program to put the maximum grant on the path to doubling the grant amount in the coming years. The Pell Grant has not kept up with the cost of college, with every year passing reducing what even a maximum Pell Grant could cover in terms of the costs of tuition and fees. The maximum Pell Grant desperately needs to be increased, ideally doubled. This increased grant amount must also be linked in future years to increase along with inflation.

Lastly, we urge your subcommittees to provide \$15 million for the Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Grant. This grant program allows college campuses to develop a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to mental health services for all college students, including those at risk for suicide, depression, and serious mental illness. These are critical problems to address, especially as the epidemic continues—in June 2020, [data](#) from the CDC showed that more than half of adults aged 18-24 had at least one adverse mental or behavioral health symptom, and more than a quarter had considered suicide in the past 30 days. This grant funding enables colleges to help students who are experiencing mental health challenges or contemplating suicide successfully complete their studies and address their underlying mental health needs. As the mental health challenges on college campuses have grown, especially in the past year of the COVID-19 pandemic, funding for this important program has become even more critical.

Thank you for considering these requests. These important funding increases will ensure the childcare, higher education, and mental health needs of today's students are addressed. Please contact us if we can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

Julie Peller