



Testimony before the U.S. Senate 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 2020

May 20, 2019

Higher Learning Advocates (HLA) would like to thank the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (L-HHS-ED) for soliciting the views and recommendations of public witnesses on Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 funding. 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.

HLA urges the subcommittee to make significant investments in key higher education and child care programs as part of the FY 2020 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 the current needs. Specifically, HLA is requesting \$7.7 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), \$150 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 and not used as a piggy bank for other funding priorities.

Before we focus on these individual programs, we need to highlight the importance of raising the non-defense discretionary (NDD) funding limits for FY 2020 and FY 2021. As you know, NDD funding would be cut by \$55 billion compared to FY 2019 spending levels under the Budget Control Act. Even with the U.S. House of Representatives establishing the overall spending level for the full House appropriations committee and



House subcommittee allocations, an eventual agreement by the House, Senate, and Administration to increase statutory NDD spending limits for FY 2020 is still necessary to avoid these cuts. Absent a bipartisan agreement to increase the non-defense discretionary spending caps, investments in education and other related critical priorities would suffer. We hope an eventual bipartisan agreement to raise these spending limits is possible in the near future to allow Congress to make the important investments we highlight, and others, possible.

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.

Our organization requests increasing 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. This is the same level that would be appropriated under the House Committee-passed LHHS bill. Low-income parents, including student parents, greatly benefit from CCDBG funding, which provides them with low-cost and easy-to-access child care. Unfortunately, a large share of eligible children from low-income families do not receive child care assistance, and the number of children served by CCDBG continues to decline. 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 \$150 million—the amount needed to provide child care support to approximately 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. In 2001, funding for CCAMPIS peaked at \$25 million but declined significantly in 2003 to \$16 million, where it remained relatively stable until FY 2017. In FY 2018, CCAMPIS funding was increased to \$50 million. CCAMPIS funding must continue to increase to best serve today's student parents.



Additionally, we urge you to maintain the initial federal investment for the Open Textbooks Pilot program at \$10 million in FY 2020 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. The prices of textbooks have increased by 88 percent between 2006 and 2016, and students typically spend \$1,240-\$1,440 on books and supplies per year. 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. 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 the opportunity to submit testimony in support of CCAMPIS, CCDBG, the Open Textbooks Pilot, and the Pell Grant. Congress must continue to invest in these programs in order to ensure today's students, including student parents and individuals from underserved populations, are able to access and complete postsecondary education.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and are happy to follow up on any questions you may have.