

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
United States Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

Thank you for your swift and robust action to alleviate the health and economic impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). As you prepare for a third economic relief package, we respectfully urge you to prioritize substantial financial support for students and institutions of higher learning.

COVID-19 has jeopardized the health, learning, and livelihoods of millions of vulnerable students, and threatens to further destabilize the institutions of higher education upon which our nation depends. Universities and colleges have taken unprecedented steps to respond to the global pandemic. From identifying new ways to deliver classes online to implementing necessary campus-wide closures, our public and private nonprofit institutions, including historically black colleges and universities, have moved rapidly to protect countless students and employees across the country.

As a result, colleges and universities face significant losses in revenue and face new, unexpected costs. These institutions rely on tuition; an anticipated decline in international and domestic enrollment would be devastating. It is highly doubtful that our higher education systems can continue operations, employment, and teaching without timely stop-gap funding from Congress.

Several student and education advocates share our concerns and have proposed immediate assistance from Congress. These organizations include the American Association of Community Colleges, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities, the American Council on Education, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and the Association of American Universities.

We implore you to include vigorous financial assistance for students and higher education institutions in the forthcoming COVID-19 relief package. We ask you to prioritize the following measures:

1. **Protecting students from student aid disruptions:** Students often depend on financial aid for their livelihood. Any disruption to that aid would destabilize students and their families who may have no other means of support. We request that student aid be retained regardless of changes in enrollment, work status, or circumstances which would otherwise jeopardize aid eligibility.
2. **Emergency stop-gap funding for colleges and universities:** Remote learning and suspended campus activities are vital steps to limit further spread of the virus. We request robust stop-gap funding to support institutions as they deal with unprecedented disruption and transition to nontraditional learning and cultural environments.

We thank you for your support of these critical investments in our nation's students and institutions of higher learning.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Tom Carper
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator