

June 24, 2015

Senator Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Room S128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Room S128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Mikulski:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to express our strong concerns with the Fiscal Year 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill passed by the subcommittee yesterday.

If enacted, the bill passed by the subcommittee will cut support for higher education, and will result in low- and middle income students paying more to pursue their college degrees. This bill has a number of differences from the bill passed by the House Committee on Appropriations on key programs that are of particular concern to our members. The Senate bill cuts critical campus-based aid programs like Federal Work-Study (FWS) and Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), and fails to make needed investments in TRIO and GEAR UP.

This bill is the unfortunate product of a budget process that caps discretionary spending well below what is necessary to meet the needs of American citizens, and instead imposes punitive funding levels on programs with demonstrated records of success. Rather than promoting economic growth and development, this bill would undermine the programs that build long-term economic health. We strongly urge the members of the Committee to reject the approach taken in this bill, and instead work to comprehensively address these arbitrary cap levels and restore discretionary funding.

All of the federal financial aid programs see cuts under this proposal. As the foundational student aid program, Pell Grants are of critical importance to low- and middle-income families trying to afford college. While we are glad that the bill provides sufficient funding for the maximum Pell award to increase by \$140, to \$5,915, we are concerned that the bill includes a rescission of \$300 million from the Pell Grant surplus. This rescission poses a threat to the financial health of the program going forward. We would strongly encourage

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the committee to prioritize the restoration of that funding in the event a greater budget deal is reached.

Other student aid programs fare worse in this bill. We are particularly disappointed that the Committee proposes to cut Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants by \$29 million dollars and Federal Work-Study by \$40 million. As these programs require matching funds from institutions, the cuts in federal funding will result in even greater reductions in available aid to students. Compounding these cuts to the financial aid programs, this bill reduces the funding available to minority-serving institutions, putting further strain on institutions already struggling to serve disproportionately low-income student populations who have been historically under-represented.

Our members are likewise deeply concerned with some of the other cuts proposed, particularly the \$6 million reduction for the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grants and the \$9 million reduction in support for the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) program. TQP grants provide the only federal funds dedicated to reforming teacher preparation, and GAANN is one of the few remaining federal programs that assist graduate students after years of cuts and eliminations. Key training programs authorized by the recently-reauthorized Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act have also been cut substantially. This will hinder the ability of the nation's postsecondary institutions to help close the skills gap that is of such great concern to the private sector. We strongly urge the members to reconsider these cuts, and prioritize their restoration if a budget deal allows for increased funding.

One of the few bright spots in the bill is the recognition of the importance of biomedical research. This bill increases funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by \$2 billion, which would be the largest single-year funding increase for the agency in over a decade. This investment will help to keep America on the leading edge of biomedical research, stimulating the economy and improving the quality of life for millions of Americans.

Similarly, our organizations appreciate the Committee's inclusion of language barring the Department of Education from further developing or implementing several regulatory efforts already underway. While we share many of the Department's stated goals, and have made repeated efforts to inform and improve their regulatory approaches, the agency has been unable or unwilling to address our concerns. Given their insistence on moving forward with these flawed approaches, the limitation language included in this bill is a necessary step to ensure that higher education issues are addressed in a thoughtful, comprehensive way with the full input of Congress and other stakeholders.

While we appreciate the difficulty posed by working at funding levels well below what is necessary, this bill simply fails to prioritize the investments necessary to spur real economic growth and promote a better educated citizenry. We hope that, rather than be satisfied with the approach taken in this bill, members will work in meaningful ways to increase the overall allocations for discretionary spending and provide sufficient funding for the critical programs funded in this bill.

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Sincerely,



Molly Corbett Broad
President

On behalf of:

American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Council on Education
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Indian Higher Education Consortium
Association of American Universities
Association of Community College Trustees
Council for Christian Colleges and Universities
Council for Opportunity in Education
EDUCAUSE
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
UNCF