March 1, 2022

The Honorable Connie Leyva  
Chair, Senate Education Committee  
1021 O Street, Room 6740  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: SB 851 (Portantino): The Cal Grant Equity and College Access Act Support

Dear Senator Leyva:

On behalf of the AICCU Education Deans and Directors Council, I write to respectfully request that you support Senate Bill 851, the Cal Grant Equity and College Access Act, by Senator Anthony Portantino. This bill is important to bring equity back to our state financial aid system to ensure that all students have access to higher education opportunities, which is critical to the beginning of the teacher pipeline and bringing greater diversity to our teacher workforce.

The Education Deans and Directors Council is the representative voice for the 43 schools and programs of education in the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities. Together, the independent sector credentials over 45% of new teachers in the state and enrolls over 20,000 students seeking to enter this critical workforce.

SB 851 brings stability to the Cal Grant award received by students attending an independent, nonprofit California college or university by removing the arbitrary nature of funding of the Cal Grant and linking future growth to a cost-of-living adjustment if certain transfer metrics are met. The bill also expands recently established supplemental programs that support students with dependent children and former and current foster youth students to those that attend a nonprofit college or university. Lastly, the bill allows community college transfer students who receive a Cal Grant award under expanded eligibility parameters to transfer to an independent institution. These are all important investments that expand access to the higher education sector that educates over 45% of new teachers in the state.

As the state continues to face a shortage of teachers in our communities, we must critically examine barriers to higher education for students, especially our low-income and historically underrepresented populations. Existing law fails to provide equitable financial support to low-income students considering or attending college. At a time when capacity constraints at our UC and CSU systems hinder local options for students, we should not limit higher education options at independent nonprofit colleges and universities in the state. This is the beginning of
the teacher workforce pipeline and financial aid is critical to bringing in students from a diverse background into the teaching field. The sector educates over 27,000 Cal Grant students, half of whom are Latino/a, and the Cal Grant investments outlined in SB 851 will better support them on their path to becoming teachers in our schools.

Because of these reasons, I respectfully ask that you support SB 851 and establish financial aid equity, strengthen college access, and support student success by ensuring the state provides strong investments in all California students and close equity gaps.

Sincerely,

Michelle Young, Ph.D.
Dean, Loyola Marymount University School of Education
Chair, AICCU Education Deans and Directors Council

CC: The Honorable Rosilicie Ochoa Bogh, Vice Chair
    Olga tía Ramirez, Principal Consultant