July 7, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  The Honorable Richard Burr
Chair, Senate Health, Education, Ranking Member, Senate Health, Education,
Labor & Pensions Committee Labor & Pensions Committee
U.S. Senate U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510 Washington, D.C. 20510

Subject: Support for the Basic Assistance for Students in College Act

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU), I write to express support for the Basic Assistance for Students in College (BASIC) Act (S.2004), sponsored by Senator Alex Padilla (CA). This legislation provides $1 billion for grants to ensure higher education institutions have the resources they need to support their students’ most fundamental needs.

AICCU is the organizational voice for over 80 WASC-accredited, nonprofit higher education institutions in California. The independent higher education sector is diverse, ranging from large research institutions to small liberal arts colleges, faith-based institutions to art and design colleges. As a sector, we enroll over 180,000 graduate students and 200,000 undergraduate students, including over 57,000 Pell Grant recipients. Our students reflect the diversity of California and face the same challenges as their colleagues in the public colleges and universities—equitable access to financial aid and opportunities, college affordability, and the cost of attendance beyond tuition and fees.

The BASIC Act will assist Title IV-participating institutions—including nonprofit colleges and universities—to research, develop, and implement plans to address students’ unmet needs, such as access to food, housing, transportation, childcare, healthcare, and technology. In recent years, the issues of student housing insecurity and access to food have risen to national attention. Nonprofit and public colleges and universities in California have responded by opening food banks on campus for students and, in some cases, for the surrounding community to access. The pandemic has also exposed the gap in access to broadband internet and technology, particularly by Black and Latino students and those from a disadvantaged background. The BASIC Act will help institutions implement real, actionable plans to support their students.

The BASIC Act also directs the Department of Education to coordinate with the Departments of Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services to share data identifying students who may be eligible for federal aid programs. This sharing of data makes eminent sense as students often do not know what programs they are eligible to receive. Subsequently, it also helps institutions prepare for a student’s arrival on campus.
Lastly, AICCU suggests an amendment to the legislation. The bill strictly defines “community college” as strictly public community colleges. We suggest using a broader definition of “community college” found in the Higher Education Act that includes nonprofit two-year colleges.

For these reasons, AICCU respectfully asks that the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee supports S.2004.

Sincerely,

Kristen F. Soares