

Kim Cook  
Executive Director  
National College Access Network

April 8, 2019

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies  
U. S. House of Representatives  
2358B Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies  
U. S. House of Representatives  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
156 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs DeLauro and Blunt and Ranking Members Cole and Murray,

Thank you for your continued leadership over the past two funding cycles to reinforce investments in the programs that support students from low-income backgrounds in their pursuit of higher education. Today, we write first to respectfully request first that the caps be increased for non-defense discretionary funding to prevent unnecessary and automatic cuts to these important programs. This would allow for the continued strong support of the nation's higher education system and students. And second, NCAN recommends these specific funding levels for the U.S. Department of Education programs:

- A maximum Pell Grant of \$6,753.

- Supplementary Educational Opportunity Grant funding of \$1.028 billion.
- Federal Work-Study funding of \$1.434 billion.
- TRIO program funding of \$1.12 billion.
- GEAR UP funding of \$395 million.

Additionally, we would request Corporation for National and Community Service – specifically its AmeriCorps program that allows some college access programs to provide near-peer mentors for their students – receive, at minimum, level funding.

The National College Access Network, founded in 1995, represents more than 450 members across the country that all work toward NCAN’s mission to build, strengthen, and empower communities committed to college access and success so that all students, especially those underrepresented in postsecondary education, can achieve their educational dreams. NCAN’s members span a broad range of the education, nonprofit, government, and civic sectors, including national and community-based nonprofit organizations, federally funded TRIO and GEAR UP programs, school districts, colleges and universities, foundations, and corporations. All are dedicated to helping underrepresented students access, afford, and succeed in higher education.

The federal investments that would most bolster this goal include the following:

### **Pell Grant Investments**

The Pell Grant award is the cornerstone of financial aid for low-income students. Without this need-based grant funding, an even smaller portion of low-income students would be able to access higher education. Congress recognized the importance of the Pell Grant over the past two years by investing in increases in the maximum award of \$175 and \$100, respectively. Given that the previously required automatic inflationary

increases have expired, these annual investments by Congress and crucial to preventing the nation's students who do not have the means to pay for college from falling farther behind in their pursuit of higher education. Even with these investments, the purchasing power of the Pell Grant for a four-year college degree from a public institution is still holding at a historic low of 28% of the cost of attendance.

Due to this loss of purchasing power, NCAN asks for consideration of a bold, multiyear [proposal](#) to address the long-term purchasing power of the Pell Grant. At its peak in 1975-76, the maximum Pell Grant award covered nearly four-fifths of a public four-year college education. NCAN realizes the fiscal challenges that face Congress and therefore recommends a multi-year interim step that would return Pell's purchasing power to 50% of the cost of a four-year public higher education, or approximately doubling the Pell Grant over the next decade. *In order to reach that goal NCAN recommends increasing the maximum Pell Grant 9% a year, each year, over the next decade. This plan would result in fiscal year 2020 appropriations including a maximum Pell Grant of \$6,753.*

If Congress had continued to adjust the maximum Pell Grant award for inflation from 1975, it would be \$6,655, only \$98 less than requested above. At minimum, Congress should increase the maximum by \$150, to \$6,345, to match the inflationary adjustment that would have taken place had the automatic adjustments continued.

### **Campus-Based Aid**

As low-income students are piecing together the resources to support their postsecondary pursuits, every dollar and every type of aid counts. For most low-income

students, the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) and Federal Work-Study help to fill holes in their financial aid packages.

- The [average SEOG award](#) for dependent students was \$800 for the 2016-17 award year. For the 2018 fiscal year, Congress generously increased the SEOG budget by 14.6%, bringing it to \$840 million and then held that funding steady for fiscal year 2019. Providing an increase again for fiscal year 2020 will allow institutions of higher education to support a greater percentage of the country's lowest-income students. *For fiscal year 2020, NCAN respectfully requests that Congress fund the SEOG program at a total of \$1.028 billion.*
- [Sixty-four percent](#) of today's students work while enrolled in school. The Federal Work-Study (FWS) program allows students to work in a flexible environment, learn important skills, and minimize the amount of time they spend commuting between work and campus. *For fiscal year 2020, NCAN respectfully requests that Congress increase the FWS program budget for a total of \$1.434 billion.*

### **Federally Funded College Access Programs – TRIO and GEAR UP**

With approximately [1.8 million high school seniors](#) defined as low-income annually, many programs are needed to meet all of their needs as they pursue their options after high school graduation. The NCAN community serves approximately 2 million students annually from middle school through college graduation. To reach all of the students needing services nationwide, our members build important partnerships both with TRIO and GEAR UP programs. *NCAN respectfully requests that Congress*

*continue its investment in federally funded college access programs at the amounts requested by their communities: \$1.12 billion for TRIO and \$395 million for GEAR UP.*

### **Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)**

For every dollar spent on national service, the country sees a [return on investment](#) that is almost fourfold. Service also plays an important role in the college access movement. In particular, many of NCAN's largest members are able to maximize their impact on underrepresented students by participating in the AmeriCorps public-private partnership. Continuing support for CNCS, and in particular the AmeriCorps program, will enable additional volunteers to work with low-income students, students of color, and students who are first in their family to attend college. *NCAN respectfully requests of that the Corporation for National and Community Service and the AmeriCorps program receive at minimum level funding.*

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our funding priorities for the fiscal year 2020. A low-income student is about half as likely to complete a postsecondary degree or credential as a high-income student. Through continued supports – both financial and programmatic – our country can work together to close this attainment gap. Thank you again for your support of this important goal.

Sincerely,



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