



The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

April 26, 2024

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito,

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of postsecondary education students and the federal programs that support them. As the National College Attainment Network (NCAN), a membership association of 600 college access and success programs across the country, we write to respectfully request that funding federal student aid programs remain a priority for the Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025. Strong investment in each of these programs is essential to ensure that college is accessible and that costs are manageable for students and families. Your robust support of federal student aid programs will help make college enrollment and completion a reality, particularly for first-generation college students and those from low-income backgrounds.

For FY25, NCAN requests these funding levels for the U.S. Department of Education programs:

- Requisite funding so that the maximum Pell Grant award can be increased to \$7,895, a \$500 increase from award year 2024-25.
- Federal Student Aid (FSA) administrative funding of \$2.7 billion.
- Postsecondary Student Success Grant (PSSG) program funding of \$100 million.
- Supplementary Educational Opportunity Grant funding of \$1.2 billion.
- Federal Work-Study funding of \$1.6 billion.
- TRIO program funding of \$1.3 billion.
- GEAR UP funding of \$410 million.

Additionally, we request that the Corporation for National and Community Service receive \$1.48 billion in funding for FY25 – and that the AmeriCorps program, that allows some college access programs to provide near-peer mentors for their students, receive \$650 million in funding.

Founded in 1995, NCAN represents more than 600 members across the country that all work toward a shared mission to build, strengthen, and empower communities and stakeholders to close equity gaps in postsecondary attainment for all students. Collectively, we are 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.

Drawing on the expertise of our hundreds of organizational members in every U.S. state, NCAN is dedicated to improving the quality and quantity of support that underrepresented students receive to apply to, enter, and succeed in postsecondary education. Students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and those who are the first in their family to attend college experience disproportionately lower rates of postsecondary success. For example, a low-income student is 29% less likely to enroll in postsecondary education directly after high school than a high-income student. Ultimately, only 35% of low-income high school students obtain a postsecondary credential by age 26, compared to 72% of high-income students.

To help close equity gaps in attainment, NCAN requests the following in federal investments:

Pell Grant Investments

The Pell Grant serves as the cornerstone of financial aid for students from low-income backgrounds pursuing higher education. The need-based grant provides crucial support for 7.2 million students each year, or about one-third of undergraduates. Without this need-based grant funding, far fewer students from low-income backgrounds would be able to access higher education. NCAN appreciates investments Congress has made to raise the maximum Pell Grant award in recent years, or maintain level funding, at minimum.

Annual investments by Congress are essential for our nation's students who are least likely to have the means to pay for education after high school. Even increases in past years, the maximum Pell Grant award's purchasing power at a public four-year institution only covers 32% of the in-state cost of attendance. At its peak in the 1970s, the maximum Pell Grant award could have covered more than three-fourths of the average cost of attendance – tuition, fees, and living expenses – at a four-year public institution.

To address Pell's declining purchasing power, and so that the maximum award can cover at least half of the cost of attendance at a public four-year institution, the maximum Pell Grant award needs to be doubled. NCAN requests Congress consider a Pell Grant award increase of \$500 through additional discretionary funding to bring the total maximum award to \$7,895 for the 2025-26 award year. NCAN applauds Congress for increasing the maximum Pell Grant award by \$400 in FY 22, and by \$500 in FY 23. Given the absence of an increase in funding for the Pell Grant in FY24, it is imperative that Congress act to regain the momentum seen in previous years and increase the maximum award for FY25. This investment is necessary to get back on track and make progress toward meeting the goal outlined in the president's budget of doubling the Pell Grant by 2029.

Funding for Federal Student Aid Administration

In the president's FY25 budget request, the Biden Administration requests \$2.7 billion in administrative funding for the management of federal student aid. Given the rocky rollout of the re-designed Free Application for Federal Student Aid, this funding is essential to ensure that the Office

of Federal Student Aid has the resources necessary to provide support for students and families, and to expeditiously address any ongoing challenges with the form.

NCAN supports this funding request to help ensure that the FAFSA launches smoothly and on time for the 2025-2026 award year. The delayed opening and consistent issues with the FAFSA form have led to a significant drop in FAFSA completions this year. The urgency for students to access need-based aid via the FAFSA only continues to grow. It is of vital importance for NCAN and our members that students and families are not subject to similar delays in the coming year, and that the FAFSA opens for the next award cycle on October 1, 2024.

Postsecondary Student Success Grant Program (PSSG)

Today, only six in ten students who enroll in B.A.-granting institutions attain a degree within six years. Among students at community colleges and those who are the first in their family to go to college, the rates are much lower. The PSSG program provides competitive grants to postsecondary institutions in partnership with non-profit college success programs, to interventions with a proven ability to help students from marginalized communities persist in college. NCAN requests \$100 million for this program in FY25 to help increase postsecondary attainment rates among first generation, low-income and students of color.

Campus-Based Aid

As low-income students piece together resources from a variety of sources to support their postsecondary education pursuits, every dollar and type of aid is significant. For most low-income students, the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) and Federal Work-Study help to fill unmet need in their financial aid packages.

The SEOG program should be increased for FY25 so that institutions of higher education can support a greater percentage of our nation's lowest-income students. For FY25, NCAN respectfully requests that Congress fund the SEOG program at a total of \$1.2 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 FY25, NCAN respectfully requests that Congress increase funding for a total of \$1.6 billion.

Federally Funded College Access Programs

High school seniors, and especially students from low-income backgrounds, require a variety of programs to help assist as they strive to pursue education beyond high school. NCAN's members serve roughly two million students annually in their path towards attainment. To reach the students who need crucial assistance services, our members build important partnerships 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: \$1.3 billion for TRIO and \$410 million for GEAR UP.

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

For every dollar spent on national service, our nation sees a substantial return on investment. Service plays an important role in the college access movement. Many of NCAN's largest members can maximize their impact for underrepresented students by participating in the AmeriCorps public-private partnership. Continuing support for CNCS, and specifically 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 that the Corporation for National and Community Service and the AmeriCorps program receive \$1.48 billion and \$650 million, respectively, for FY25.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our funding priorities for the 2025 fiscal year. Through continued support – both financial and programmatic – our country can work together to close gaps in attainment, where a low-income student is about half as likely to complete a postsecondary degree or credential as a high-income student. NCAN appreciates your leadership in Congress to support these important federal programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Cook".

Kim Cook
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