



March 4, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
U.S. House Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education Appropriations
Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Funding Priorities to Support Student Basic Needs

Dear Chair Capito, Ranking Member Baldwin, Chair Aderholt, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

Thank you for your recent bipartisan work to maintain funding for higher education.¹ As you work to craft a Fiscal Year 2027 bill for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, **The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs** requests that you again invest in critical federal grant and student aid programs that help students in higher education afford the full cost of attendance in higher education, including the *non-tuition* costs that students must be able to meet to succeed in and out of the classroom. These unavoidable living costs include food, housing, physical and mental health care, child care, hygiene, and transportation.

At The Hope Center, we focus on finding solutions to the challenge of college affordability to help more students graduate, get good jobs, succeed in the workforce, raise a family, and contribute to our nation's economy and democracy. The barriers are substantial. Students today are much more likely to support themselves financially than they once were, often while working and raising their own dependents.

Our research shows that **three in five students** in higher education do not have enough to eat or a safe place to live.² Federal data indicate that undergraduate students experience food insecurity at *twice the rate* of other U.S. households, affecting and threatening the success of 3.8 million students.³ One in ten undergraduate students, or nearly 1.4 million, experiences homelessness.

While public and tax benefits could help many students with living costs, uptake is exceedingly low due to the programs' complexity and limited funding. Financial aid is critical, but is often insufficient, especially for unexpected expenses. Many campuses, systems, and states are working to address student

¹ The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs. (2026, February). [Congress Maintains Funding for Student Basic Needs in FY26 Despite Threat of Cuts.](#)

² The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs. (2025, February). [The Hope Center 2023-2024 Student Basic Needs Survey Report.](#)

³ During 2019-20, when comparable federal data were last collected, undergraduate food insecurity was 23%, while the rate among all U.S. households for the same year was 10.5%. Sources: McKibben, B., Wu, J., and Abelson, S. (2023, August). [New Federal Data Confirm that College Students Face Significant—and Unacceptable—Basic Needs Insecurity.](#) The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs at Temple University; U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2023, October). [Household Food Security in the United States in 2020.](#)

basic needs insecurity, but it remains a pervasive barrier for students to be able to enroll in and complete higher education successfully.

Given these urgent affordability challenges, we hope you will protect and increase investments in federal programs that play a crucial role in ensuring that students receive the financial resources and support they need to be academically successful. We ask Congress to secure the **largest possible allocation** for the LHHS-ED appropriations bill, and to make these needed investments without cutting other education and health programs that support students.

Additionally, given the Administration’s proposals to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education, and the temporary but widespread cancellation of mental health grants at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services earlier this year, we ask that you consider additional bill and report language to ensure that FY27 funding levels are spent in accordance with Congressional intent. We also ask Congress to limit the use of interagency agreements to transfer significant portions of existing program administration to other agencies, which are creating challenges and confusion for many applicants and grantees throughout the application, award, and reporting processes.

Basic Needs Grants

We **deeply** appreciate the Committee’s bipartisan work to reinstate the **Basic Needs Grant** within the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) at the U.S. Department of Education for FY26. We ask that you allocate **\$45 million** for Basic Needs Grants in FY27. This highly competitive program is the only federal investment supporting comprehensive interventions to address and prevent student basic needs insecurity, such as connecting students with programs to help them address their recurring financial challenges or deal with unexpected emergencies.

Demand for the program is extremely high, and in the last funding cycle, all grantees had a nearly-perfect score. Still, at least 22 states and Puerto Rico have institutions that have received funding since FY 2021, and it has been a tremendous success. We also urge you to maintain the report language that establishes best practices for the program and, if necessary, to modify it to ensure the Department spends the funds in accordance with these directives. We also ask for new report language requiring a new grant competition for the Basic Needs Grant and other FIPSE programs in FY 2027.

Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program

We support increasing the **Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS)** program at the U.S. Department of Education to **\$500 million** for FY27. We deeply appreciate Congress’s support for this program, but the current level of investment in CCAMPIS remains far below the level necessary to meet parenting students’ child care needs.

More than four million college students are parents of dependent children, representing one in five undergraduates and nearly one in three graduate students. These students need child care that is convenient to where they work and go to school. Despite growing demand, the share of colleges with on-campus child care facilities has actually declined over the past two decades.⁴ Additional funding could reverse this troubling trend. Unfortunately, the vast majority of parenting students do not qualify for, or

⁴ Huelsman, M. (2024, September 19). [It's Time for Congress to Meet the Needs of Parenting Students](#) The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs at Temple University.

cannot access, the limited funding available through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) administered at the state level. CCAMPIS and CCDF serve very different purposes.

We also ask you to maintain the bill language that waives the maximum grant cap in the CCAMPIS program to make the program more accessible and valuable, especially for under-resourced colleges, including community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Grants

We also ask Congress to substantially increase funding for **the Garrett Lee Smith (GLS) Campus Suicide Prevention Grant** at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. GLS Campus Grants are the only federal investment in college students' mental and behavioral health services. The program is extremely small relative to the extensive needs of students. Nearly two-thirds of college students are experiencing clinically significant symptoms of one or more mental health problems (i.e., screen positive for depression, anxiety, eating disorder, non-suicidal self-injury, and/or suicidal ideation)—yet *nearly half* of those students report receiving no treatment at all in the past year.⁵

The Hope Center's Student Basic Needs survey also found that more than half of students (54%) who had previously stopped out of college reported doing so because of mental health issues.⁶ Mental health programs for K-12 students have received significant new funding in recent years, but the crisis of mental health in higher education has gone largely unaddressed.

We appreciate the Committee's increase to the GLS Campus Grant program in FY26, and request that you **equalize funding between GLS Campus and Youth grants**, which totaled **\$45.8 million** in FY26. Additionally, we request that you again include bill or report language directing the agency to prioritize grants and waive matching fund requirements for community colleges, HBCUs, TCUs, and other MSIs, which have few resources to spare.

Pell Grants

The Hope Center also joins the higher education community in requesting that you provide sufficient mandatory or discretionary funding to avoid any cuts to award levels or reductions in **Pell Grant** eligibility, given the looming \$16.9 billion shortfall in the program by the end of FY27.⁷ Your work to secure a larger allocation for LHHS-ED will be essential to closing this gap.

The bipartisan commitment Congress made under the *FAFSA Simplification Act* to expand access to Pell Grants is now bearing fruit, with more students applying for and receiving Pell Grants, and more students and families expected to enroll in and complete college. But it has not always been this way. More than a decade ago, shortsighted cuts to student aid eligibility to backfill a gap in Pell Grant funding had a devastating impact on student success and disproportionately harmed hundreds of thousands of

⁵ Abelson, S. (2026, February 3). [Our Country Rallied to Defend Mental Health. Let's Make It Last for Students. The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs.](#) The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs at Temple University.

⁶ The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs. (2025, February). [The Hope Center 2023-2024 Student Basic Needs Survey Report.](#)

⁷ Zampini, M. (2026, February 17). [The Pell Grant Program Faces a Major Funding Gap—Congress Must Act.](#) The Institute for College Access & Success.

underserved students (for example, taking away year-round Pell Grants and imposing arbitrary time limits on those grants).⁸ Cutting lifetime Pell eligibility reduced both enrollment and academic performance.⁹

While the current shortfall undoubtedly makes it challenging to increase the Pell Grant's maximum award, we note that the current maximum of \$7,395 has remained unchanged since July 1, 2023, and has lost more than \$470 in purchasing power due to inflation since then. The maximum grant now covers just 24% of the average cost of attending an in-state public four-year college.¹⁰ And far too many students are excluded from, or lose access to, Pell Grants each award year. Over the long-term, moving the program fully to mandatory funding would provide greater stability for students, families, and institutions alike.

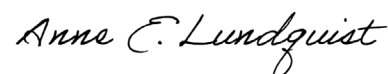
We ask Congress to **protect current Pell Grant eligibility** and award levels, coordinate with authorizers to add additional mandatory funding, and advocate for higher allocations to the LHHS-ED bill, to stabilize the Pell Grant program this year and through at least the end of FY27.

Campus-Based Aid

Finally, we support investments to help the campus-based aid programs—**Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG)** and **Federal Work-Study (FWS)**—better maintain their purchasing power for students and families. These programs have not been adjusted for inflation despite rising costs of living. Like the Student Aid Alliance, we ask for the **funding needed to cover inflation** since FY 2023.¹¹ We also ask Congress to **include bill language restoring the ability of colleges to operate SEOG as emergency aid** to help students cover unexpected expenses.¹² Restoring this flexibility will help limited SEOG dollars go further for students and help colleges and financial aid offices respond to changing circumstances, including natural disasters or community emergencies, to keep students enrolled. Unfortunately, despite the incredible success of emergency aid, its use has declined precipitously over the last few years as federal funding has dried up.¹³ Reinstating this flexibility will support student success.

Thank you for considering these important requests to support students' basic needs, college affordability, and success. We look forward to working with you to help students reach their full potential. Please don't hesitate to reach out at anne.lundquist@temple.edu if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Anne Lundquist
Director
The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs

⁸ Adams, C. (2012, January). [Budget Deal Ushers in New Pell Grant Eligibility Rules](#). *Education Week*.

⁹ Sparks, D. (2025, March). [To Give or to Take: Exploring Effects of Reductions in Pell Lifetime Eligibility](#). *The Journal of Higher Education*.

¹⁰ The College Board. (2025). [Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2025](#).

¹¹ Student Aid Alliance. (2025, March 19). [Student Aid Alliance FY26 Funding Request](#).

¹² McKibben, B. (2023, August). [Making College Financial Aid Flexible and Responsive: The Case for Continuing the Federal Investment in Emergency Aid Grants](#). The Hope Center at Temple University.; Bipartisan Policy Center. (2020, January). [A New Course for Higher Education](#).; Davis, R. & Duke-Benfield, A.E. (2023). [College Emergency Aid: The Safety Net that Proves Its Value for Today's Students](#). Today's Students Coalition.

¹³ Trellis Strategies. (2026). [Emergency Aid in the Wake of the Pandemic](#).