

April 5, 2024

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
U.S. Senate Labor, HHS, Education, and Related
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20510

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

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

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

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

As you develop a fiscal year (FY) 2025 appropriations bill for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, **The Hope Center at Temple University** requests that you invest in programs that help students in higher education meet their basic needs. These necessities include food, housing, child care, health care (including mental and behavioral health support), technology, clothing, hygiene, and transportation.

The Hope Center is an action-research organization focused on college affordability, particularly the non-tuition costs facing students in higher education that can substantially impact their ability to succeed. New nationally representative data released by the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that nearly **one in four** undergraduate students are experiencing food insecurity—twice the rate of all other households—and almost one in ten are experiencing homelessness.¹ And, our research shows that **three in five** students struggle to find enough to eat or a safe place to live, and systemically marginalized students face much higher rates of basic needs insecurity.²

We appreciate your work to prevent many harmful cuts to education in FY 2024 but urge your subcommittees to make long overdue and urgent increases to these programs this year—at a minimum, to ensure investments keep pace with inflation.³

Students and families are confronting a “perfect storm” of increased costs. Many states are considering cutting higher education operating funds and hiking tuition and fees. Rent, food, transportation, clothing, and other essentials are more expensive, but student aid remains frozen, and debt levels have started to climb again. Undergraduate enrollment remains down by more than 760,000 students compared to the fall before the pandemic,⁴ recent financial supports like federal emergency aid have expired, and the roll-out

¹ 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 at Temple University.

² The Hope Center at Temple University. (2021, March). [The Hope Center Survey 2021: Basic needs insecurity during the ongoing pandemic](#).

³ McKibben, B. & Huelsman, M. (2024, March 25). [The Government Funding Deal: For Students, It's Treading Water](#). The Hope Center at Temple University.

⁴ National Student Clearinghouse. (2024). [Current term enrollment estimates: fall 2023](#).

of this year's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is now posing significant challenges for students trying to enroll (or reenroll) in college this fall.⁵

Despite the restrictive discretionary budget caps for FY 2025, we hope your subcommittee will increase higher education investments. Several federal grant programs play a crucial role in helping to ensure that students receive the financial resources and support they need to be academically successful.

First, we ask that you allocate **\$45 million** to the highly competitive **Basic Needs Grant** program, on par with two other critical programs within the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). First funded in FY 2021, this program funds systemic interventions to support basic needs insecurity, such as connecting students with public and tax benefits programs for which they may be eligible and surveying the needs of students on campus. The Basic Needs Grant program serves the widest scope of students in FIPSE. We also urge you to maintain report language that elevates this program's focus on systemic and holistic solutions to address students' basic needs insecurity.

Additionally, we support increasing the **Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS)** program to **\$500 million** to meet the growing needs of parenting students. This amount will provide child care to 100,000 new students who struggle to balance work, school, and family obligations.⁶ More than four million college students are parents of dependent children, representing one in five undergraduates and nearly one in three graduate students in the United States. Other child care programs and subsidies have received significant increases in recent years, but CCAMPIS has not. Despite substantial need among parenting students, the share of colleges with on-campus child care has declined over the past two decades.⁷ New funding is urgently needed. We also appreciate the bill language carried since FY 2022 that waives the maximum grant cap in the CCAMPIS program to make it economically viable for under-resourced colleges, including community colleges, HBCUs, TCUs, and other MSIs.

We also ask the subcommittee to substantially increase funding for **the Garrett Lee Smith (GLS) Campus Suicide Prevention Grant**, the only federal program currently available to directly support college students' mental and behavioral health services. The nationally recognized Healthy Minds Study finds that nearly half of all college students (49 percent) are struggling with clinically significant anxiety or depression, but less than half (46 percent) of those students have had any mental health treatment in the past year.⁸ In particular, community college students, low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color across institutions report higher levels of unmet mental health needs.⁹ Studies also show that students experiencing inadequate nutrition, hunger, food insecurity, or other challenges related to

⁵ Horowitz, R. (2024, March 30). *Colleges Are Facing an Enrollment Nightmare*. *The Atlantic*.

⁶ Higher Learning Advocates. (2023, March). *Coalition Letter on CCAMPIS*.

⁷ Huelsman, M. and Rios, L. (2023, February 10). *Congress Needs to Address the Child Care Crisis for Parenting Students. Here's How*. The Hope Center at Temple University.

⁸ Healthy Minds Network. (2023). *Health Minds Study 2022-2023 Data Report*.

⁹ Lipson, S., Phillips, M., Winqvist, N., Eisenberg, D., and Lattie, E.G.. (2021). *Mental Health Conditions Among Community College Students: A National Study of Prevalence and Use of Treatment Services*. *Psychiatric Services* 72, no. 10 (October): 1126–1133.; Lipson, S.K., Kern, A., Eisenberg, D., and Breland-Noble, A.M.. (2018). *Mental Health Disparities Among College Students of Color*. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 63, no. 3 (September 1): 348–356.; Olaniyan, M., Magnelia, S., Coca, V., Abeyta, M., Vasquez, M., Harris III, F., & Gadwah-Meaden, C.. (2023). *Two pandemics: Racial disparities in basic needs insecurity among college students during the COVID-19 pandemic*. The Hope Center at Temple University.

poverty are more likely to experience higher rates of anxiety, stress, and depression.¹⁰ Mental health programs serving 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 request that you equalize funding between the GLS campus grants and the youth grants to states, which totaled **\$43.8 million** in FY 2024. Additionally, we request report language to prioritize grants to community colleges, HBCUs, TCUs, and other MSIs, where mental health needs are significant but resources are scarce.

The Hope Center also joins the higher education community in requesting you provide all the necessary discretionary funding for the **Pell Grant** program to avoid any cuts or reductions in eligibility. We sincerely appreciate your timely action to shore up the program’s support during the FY 2024 process, but recent projections that the program may face a shortfall in FY 2025 are alarming.¹¹ 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 underserved students (for example, taking away year-round Pell Grants and imposing arbitrary time limits on those grants).¹² The subcommittee should make every effort to avoid new eligibility cuts. Instead, we urge you to increase discretionary funding for the program to close any gap before the fiscal year begins.

We also support efforts to restore funding for the campus-based aid programs, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG) and Federal Work-Study (FWS), to their inflation-adjusted pre-sequester funding levels. SEOG provides need-based grant aid of up to \$4,000 per student to more than 1.6 million students, and matching funds from colleges help the program go even further. The FWS program provides federal and institutional funding to support employment to 630,000 students annually. We ask for **\$1.19 billion for SEOG** and **\$1.603 billion for FWS**, respectively. We additionally ask that the subcommittee embrace the widespread consensus that colleges should again be allowed to operate SEOG as emergency aid to help students afford unexpected expenses.¹³ To do so, we ask that you include the following bill language:

Section 413B of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070b–1) is amended by adding at the end the following: “(d) Grants for Emergency Aid.—Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, an institution of higher education may reserve any amount of an institution’s allocation under this subpart for a fiscal year to award, in such fiscal year, emergency financial assistance, as described in section 480(i)(5).”

¹⁰ Martinez, S. M., Frongillo, E. A., Leung, C., & Ritchie, L.. (2018). [No food for thought: Food insecurity is related to poor mental health and lower academic performance among students in California’s public university system.](#) *Journal of Health Psychology*, 25(12), 1930–1939.; Bruening, M., Brennhofner, S., van Woerden, I., Todd, M., & Laska, M.. (2016). [Factors related to the high rates of food insecurity among diverse, urban college freshmen.](#) *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 116(9), 1450–1457.; Coakley, K.E., Cargas, S., Walsh-Dillely, M. et al.. (2022). [Basic Needs Insecurities Are Associated with Anxiety, Depression, and Poor Health Among University Students in the State of New Mexico.](#) *J Community Health* 47, 454–463.; Broton K.M., Mohebbi M., and Lingo M.D. (2022). [Basic Needs Insecurity and Mental Health: Community College Students’ Dual Challenges and Use of Social Support.](#) *Community College Review*, 50(4), 456–482.

¹¹ Committee for a Responsible Fiscal Budget. (2024, February 21). [Pell Grants Face a Big Shortfall.](#)

¹² Adams, C. (2012, January). [Budget Deal Ushers in New Pell Grant Eligibility Rules.](#) *Education Week.*

¹³ 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.

Additionally, we ask that you provide robust funding for **Student Aid Administration** (SAA) to ensure the smooth and timely operation of the FAFSA and financial aid process for the 2025-26 award year. The difficulties and delays in the current cycle threaten to imperil student enrollment and exacerbate their challenges with basic needs. Additionally, we ask your subcommittee to help link the financial aid process to the public and tax benefits that support students' basic needs. A recent survey found that 73 percent of financial aid offices are not conducting any outreach to students about public or tax benefits and only a few plan to do so.¹⁴ Therefore, we also ask that you include report or bill language in SAA to ensure that students and families can proactively receive information about the public and tax benefits for which they may be eligible, including by addressing any data-sharing limitations and requiring a checkbox on the FAFSA for students and families to authorize and request information about benefits that can be applied toward their cost of attendance.

Finally, as you review the **community project funding** requests, we urge you to prioritize initiatives that help improve students' basic needs security in higher education. At least 14 such basic needs investments were included in the FY 2024 bill, which will greatly serve the needs of students at those campuses and systems. But these projects represented less than two percent of the more than 700 higher education projects receiving funding in FY 2024.¹⁵ Community projects should always be student-centered, and under-resourced institutions serving large numbers of low-income students should be prioritized.

Thank you for considering these requests to support students' basic needs, college affordability, and academic success.

Sincerely,

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The Hope Center

¹⁴ Blake, Jessica. (2024, February 5). [Using Financial Aid Data to Help Students Meet Basic Needs](#). *Inside Higher Ed*.

¹⁵ Knott, Katherine. (2024, April). [Congress Sends \\$1.3 Billion to Colleges in Earmarks](#). *Inside Higher Ed*.