

April 22, 2020

Senator Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator McConnell, Senator Schumer, Representative Pelosi and Representative McCarthy,

UPCEA is composed of the nation's leaders in delivering quality online and professional education to adult and nontraditional learners who now represent the majority of today's students. Once on the periphery of institutions of higher education, today our members are front and center as all postsecondary learning has rapidly shifted to a remote format. Over the next months and years the increased use of online education will serve a larger population of learners than could have been imagined even months ago. To this end, we ask for your support: in providing additional funding for these students and institutions; by recognizing and qualifying distance education students as part of any future disbursement calculations; and to provide broad waiver authority to the Secretary of Education for a temporary period of time.

**Additional Funding for Students and Institutions is Needed**

UPCEA wishes to express our appreciation for the support provided to students and institutions in the CARES Act, while highlighting the need for additional support. American higher education is confronted with unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students are struggling to adjust to rapid changes in their families' financial circumstances, and institutions are grappling with closed campuses and wholesale shifts to distance education, creating an immense need for online/distance education infrastructure. The CARES Act was an important step towards ensuring that students, especially the most vulnerable, have their basic needs addressed. Similarly,

federal funds to support colleges and universities will help keep institutions operating, even as they attempt to plug massive holes in their budgets. But the amount of money for students and higher education institutions contained in the CARES Act does not come close to filling the gap. As Moody's reported, the total support to institutions provided in CARES will only be "equal to around 1 percent of total university expenditures," and higher education "continues to face significant financial challenges heading into fiscal year 2021, including potential losses of tuition revenue, state funding, endowment income and gifts." <sup>1</sup> Some recent estimates of the loss carried by institutions amounts to \$46.6 billion<sup>2</sup>. Emergency grants to students totaling \$23.3 billion will enable them to begin or continue their college educations. As you know, the CARES Act provided only \$14 billion to higher education, and based on these estimates, a significantly higher amount of funding is required to meet the needs of these students and institutions, and the communities they live in.

### **Include Distance Education Students in Funding Calculations**

However, we request that for future funding, the calculation of funds disbursement be adjusted to include distance education students. While this was explicitly not the case in the CARES Act summation, taking into account the large portion of students and institutions who participate in full-time distance education programs will bring needed support during these unprecedented times. Online educators and administrators are taking part in helping minimize academic disruption across the nation, and their units are key in upholding and expanding the access to education in these times of social distancing. Over the next several weeks, we anticipate there will be increased conversations about the effectiveness of online education, the role online education can and should play in continuity planning, how to effectively transition face-to-face courses online during a crisis, and how to best support both faculty and learners who might unexpectedly need to navigate online learning spaces. These are all critical conversations, and these discussions will underscore the need for current online students and institutions to be supported equally in these funding allocations.

### **Limited Waiver Authority for Institutions of Higher Education**

We also ask for further waiver authority for higher education institutions from the Secretary during a limited timeframe. While we saw limited waiver authority granted to the Secretary for certain institutions and provisions related to higher education in the CARES Act, we believe more is needed. Institutions face numerous deadlines, existing requirements, and regulations which many institutions will struggle to meet as we move through this crisis and its fallout. Institutions of higher

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/06/coronavirus-news-archive>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Letter-House-Higher-Ed-Supplemental-Request-040920.pdf>



education should be granted streamlined waivers in regards to these matters, similar to K-12 institutions. We feel it is necessary to provide this authority only during the timeframe in which disaster relief is needed for institutions and students affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

We trust that this letter has helped highlight the enormous and urgent challenges facing higher education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the small legislative tweaks we see as most helpful to students and the entire higher education community. We thank you for the support Congress has already provided to higher education through the CARES Act, and we are grateful for the understanding Congress has shown of the sizable remaining needs of students and institutions, for the inclusion of distance education students, and for the need for waiver authority. We appreciate your time and attention to these issues, and look forward to working with you to ensure that this critical funding is included in the supplemental bill currently under consideration.

Sincerely,

Bob Hansen  
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UPCEA

Ricky LaFosse  
Chair  
UPCEA Policy Committee

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