



California Student Aid Commission
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The Honorable Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

We are writing to you today on behalf of the most vulnerable population in our public higher education system – the lowest income and desperately struggling college students hit hardest by COVID-19.

On April 14th, U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos announced the highly anticipated release of \$3 billion in emergency education relief to be distributed to Governors across the country. California is expected to receive over \$355 million from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund, included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). On behalf of the California Student Aid Commission (Commission) and the California Community College Chancellor's Office (Chancellor's Office), **we urge you to consider directing a portion of these funds towards student financial aid to support emergency basic needs.**

The Commission and the Chancellor's Office request an allocation from the GEER Fund of \$25 million to provide one-time additional relief to current competitive Cal Grant B Access Award recipients. The Commission administers the Cal Grant program, which provides financial aid coverage for tuition and fees to eligible low- and middle-income students. The Cal Grant B award provides an additional Access Award to low-income students of up to \$1,672 per year for living expenses. An allocation of \$25 million would provide an additional **\$500 supplement to the Cal Grant B Access Award**, adjusted by enrollment status (i.e. part-time vs. full-time), to **71,804 Cal Grant B recipients** (new and renewal awards) in the Competitive Cal Grant program. Adjusting for enrollment intensity, the average award to students would be approximately \$330.

An estimated 70 percent of these Cal Grant B recipients attend California Community Colleges, which saw the least amount of per-student support from the CARES Act due to an allocation formula that favors institutions with high numbers of Pell Grant recipients. The COVID crisis has not lessened Community College students' challenges; if anything, it has exacerbated them, with many students losing their jobs

and finding themselves unable to afford the basic needs to succeed in college. With the existing Cal Grant framework, the Commission has the capacity and infrastructure to target resources to students with financial needs efficiently.

The COVID-19 health crisis has resulted in a significant economic strain on our state and the economic impact on California college students is no exception. Students were already vulnerable and struggling to cover the costs of food, housing, transportation, and childcare even before the health crisis. For example, the Commission's recent [Student Expenses and Resources Survey \(SEARS\)](#) indicated at least one-third of students had experienced food or housing insecurity in any 30-day period. Now, in the midst of campus closures and shelter-in-place orders, many students have found themselves and/or their parents unemployed and uncertain about what the future holds for their education. It is more critical than ever that California prioritize financial resources for students' basic needs. Their livelihoods – not just their success as students – depends on it.

The Commission and the Chancellor's Office commend Congress' passage of the CARES Act, which included \$1.7 billion in higher education emergency relief funding for California from the Education Stabilization Fund, half of which will go directly to students in the form of emergency grants. This will provide critical aid to help address the needs of students, especially those who have lost their jobs. However, with little guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education, many uncertainties remain about which students will be able to access this relief, including undocumented students who are ineligible for federal financial aid. Furthermore, campus financial aid offices will likely be overwhelmed as they grapple with student appeals and how to equitably administer the relief funding. It is widely expected that this funding will not be enough to meet the needs of students or institutions.

As part of the statewide response to COVID-19 fallout, the Commission and the Chancellor's Office endeavor to be part of the solution and ensure that college students are not left behind. While we are sensitive to the challenges involved in prioritizing federal and state spending, we urge you to provide as much relief as possible for California's college students. We believe it is critical for state to ensure that any COVID-19 relief efforts benefit ALL college students with financial need. Investing in college affordability for Californians will help mitigate the unfolding economic decline. Today's college students will be crucial to our state's economic recovery in the years to come.

To this end, while we recognize that the State's fiscal condition has changed significantly in recent weeks, we would like to reaffirm our commitment to systemic financial aid reform to reduce the total net cost of attendance our lowest-income students face. The COVID crisis has only exacerbated the challenges our students face in financing their total college costs; balancing work and studies; and attending full-time and transferring or graduating in a timely manner. We hope to continue working with your Administration and the Legislature on this issue that is so vital to California's future.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and are tremendously grateful for your steady leadership during this unprecedented time. Please do not hesitate to contact either one of us to discuss this further.

Signed,



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California Student Aid Commission



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