July 22, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Room H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson and Leader Jeffries,

As president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), I write to express deep concern and opposition to H.R. 9029, the Fiscal Year 2025 Labor-Health and Human Services-Education (LHHS-ED) appropriations bill, as it would pull critical Department of Education aid from students, jeopardizing their path to degree completion and flat fund critical National Institutes of Health biomedical research while substantially reorganizing the agency without the insight and partnership of key stakeholders. While I understand the significant budgetary constraints under which Congress is operating and the particular challenges due to the LHHS-ED subcommittee allocation, these are investments the country cannot afford to cut.

APLU is a membership organization that fosters a community of university leaders collectively working to advance the mission of public research universities. The association’s U.S membership consists of more than 230 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations spanning across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and six U.S. territories. The association and its members collectively focus on increasing access, equity, completion, and workforce readiness; promoting pathbreaking scientific research; and bolstering economic and community engagement. Annually, its U.S. member campuses enroll 4.3 million undergraduates and 1.3 million graduate students, award 1.25 million degrees, employ 1.2 million faculty and staff, and conduct $58 billion in university-based research.

APLU is deeply alarmed by the steep cuts to Federal Work Study (FWS) and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG) in the Fiscal Year 2025 funding measure. Investment in student financial aid programs opens doors to postsecondary education to low-income students and furthers the development of an American workforce prepared to globally compete. FWS and SEOG build upon the cornerstone of federal student aid, the Pell Grant, to keep students on the path to degree completion. Halving FWS and SEOG, combined with flat funding the Pell grant for a second consecutive year and other proposed cuts to postsecondary education programs in the bill, would create financial emergencies and shortfalls for low-income students. The evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that the number one reason for students, including academically high-achieving students, dropping out of college is financial challenges. At a time when the Congressional Budget Office estimates 490,000 fewer Pell recipients enrolling this fall, Congress should not impose additional hurdles towards enrollment for low-income students. Limiting funding for these programs would not only drive-up student borrowing, it would also create a real and immediate financial shortfall for current low-income students who rely on these programs to earn their degree.

On the National Institutes of Health (NIH), flat funding the federal government’s largest research agency while other competitor nations are increasing funding for life science research substantially weakens U.S. R&D leadership. Additionally, the House bill proposes a significant reorganization of NIH, without substantial input from stakeholders and without a single
hearing. The House Energy and Commerce Committee’s current request for information is a more appropriate venue for consideration of NIH reform. At a minimum, the House should not incorporate such wide-ranging policies without reviewing robust stakeholder feedback. Given the vital mission of NIH, a rushed reorganization without due consideration is excessively risky and endangers the future of our world-leading biomedical research enterprise.

APLU urges the U.S. House of Representatives to reject steep cuts to essential student aid programs and policy to reorganize NIH attached to appropriations without thoughtful consideration to stakeholder feedback. Thank you for consideration of APLU’s views.

Sincerely,

Mark Becker
President
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities

CC: Members of the 118th Congress