

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 27, 2022

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As you begin drafting the Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) appropriations bill for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, we write to express our continued support for significant funding for college retention and completion initiatives. Specifically, the proposed \$110 million investment in a new Retention and Completion Grants program in President Biden's budget request recognizes that more federal funding is needed to support the hundreds of thousands of college students who drop out of school each year without graduating or earning their degree. These investments will not only pay significant dividends to students through stronger long-term wages and employment outcomes, but will also strengthen our broader economy by building a more highly skilled and competitive workforce. Given this, we strongly encourage you to fund these evidence-based College Retention and Completion Grants at the \$110 million level requested in the President's budget.

The United States has made major strides to improve college access and affordability among historically underrepresented student populations in recent decades, including students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and students who are the first generation in their families to attend college. Yet troubling disparities in college completion rates persist. The six-year graduation rate for Latino students is ten percentage points lower than for white students, and Black students complete at a rate more than twenty percentage points lower than their white peers.

These disparities are so important because successfully completing a college degree or credential is a key stepping-stone to the middle class, but this upward mobility can be significantly impacted when a student doesn't graduate. Research has found that college students who drop out of school see income gains only half as large as those who graduate (compared to those who don't attend any college). In addition, students who start college but don't earn a degree have employment rates that are five percentage points below those of associate degree holders and ten percentage points below those of bachelor's degree holders.

Completing college doesn't just benefit students, but also their families, their communities, and the economy as a whole. If two- and four-year college completion rates improved from 57% to 84%, research suggests that over 100,000 workers could gain employment just for a single class of graduates nationwide. At a time when workforce shortages continue to hold our economic recovery back, this increased labor force participation could play an important role in supporting economic growth in our communities.

Given these large potential gains to students and our economy, greater and more targeted federal investment is needed to close these attainment gaps. Rigorous research has demonstrated that support models that employ comprehensive approaches to student success and provide intensive academic, career, and personal services can powerfully improve postsecondary outcomes and graduation rates for our nation's most vulnerable students. However, the institutions that are most likely to enroll and serve students facing the largest barriers to completing a college degree often have the fewest financial resources to address students' needs or to launch and sustain such initiatives. Programs such as CUNY ASAP in New York, One Million Degrees in Illinois, Project Quest in Texas, and Bottom Line in Massachusetts and New York have all met a high evidence tier for effectiveness in increasing credit accumulation, persistence, and degree completion. For example, studies have shown that the CUNY ASAP program nearly doubled the three-year graduation rate for associate degree students, and Bottom Line students were eight percentage points more likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree within five years of high school graduation. These programs offer replicable models that can be scaled through large-scale investment in a Retention and Completion Grants program.

The initial \$5 million allocation for these types of initiatives in the FY22 omnibus appropriations package was a key step in the right direction to support under-resourced students and the schools they attend, and will deliver a large return on investment to our economy and communities. Yet we know that a much greater and longer-term investment will be needed to sustain and expand high-impact student success practices, particularly those meeting the high bar for receiving an "expansion" grant under the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program based on prior effectiveness. This critical investment of \$110 million to bolster evidence-based college retention and completion initiatives would provide students with support to reach their postsecondary education goals and institutions with resources to make strides in closing gaps in college degree attainment. The program will ensure that our higher education system fulfills its potential to better students' lives and bolster our economy and our nation's future.

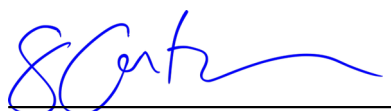
Sincerely,



Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress



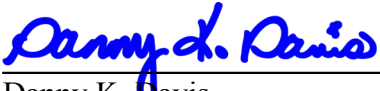
Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



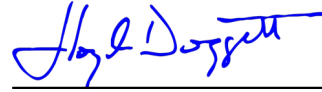
Sean Casten
Member of Congress



Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



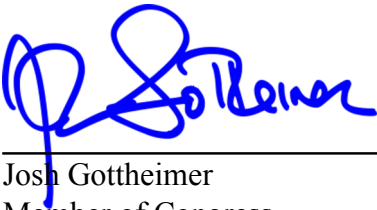
Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



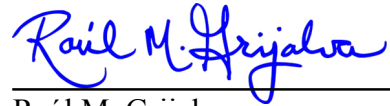
Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



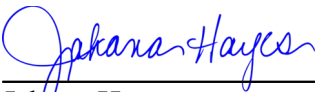
Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



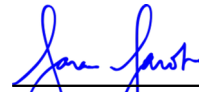
Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress



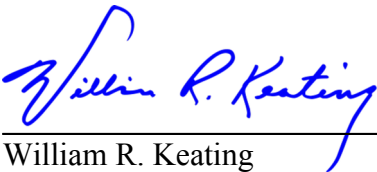
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



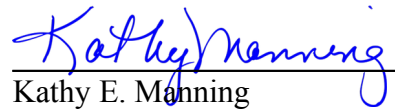
William R. Keating
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Kathy E. Manning
Member of Congress



Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress



Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress



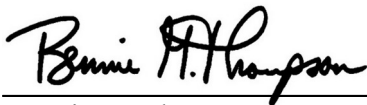
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress



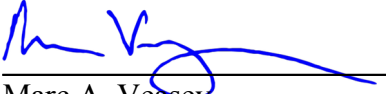
Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Marc A. Veasey
Member of Congress



Nikema Williams
Member of Congress