May 4, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 136  
Washington, D.C., 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 125 Washington, D.C., 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy, Vice Chairman Shelby, Chair Murray, and Ranking Member Blunt:

We want to thank the Subcommittee for your continued support and recognition of the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). As you consider the difficult and important work of appropriating precious public resources for the FY 2023 Labor, Health, Human Services and Education Subcommittee, we urge you to continue the Subcommittee’s strong investment in GEAR UP and request that you provide robust funding for this program.

At a time where 65% of jobs will require some postsecondary training, ensuring that students are prepared for and succeed in higher education is essential for our nation’s economic, civic, and social wellbeing. Yet for far too many students, postsecondary education remains out of reach. This cost-effective college readiness program has helped millions of low-income students progress on the pathway to college and build a more stable future for themselves, their communities and our nation.

Compounding this educational inequity, COVID-19 has dramatically impacted college-going rates for low-income students. This impact has been seen largely among first-time, first-year students, with National Student Clearinghouse reporting, “For graduates at high-poverty high schools there was a 32.6% decline in attending college, compared with a 16.4% decline for graduates of low-poverty schools.” GEAR UP programs have showed their strength and success in the face of the new challenges faced throughout this pandemic, quickly pivoting to virtual advising, virtual tutoring, and more. However, the COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that higher education is still not accessible and attainable for all students.

Data shared by the U.S. Department of Education on the most sizeable class of GEAR UP students affirms the impact that the program is having on young people. GEAR UP high school graduates are enrolling immediately into postsecondary education at rates substantially higher (77.3% in 2014) than the national average for low-income students (45.5% in 2013). The GEAR UP program is truly a locally driven, highly flexible model for closing achievement gaps and creating opportunity.

Given this success, an increase to GEAR UP funding would allow the U.S. Department of Education to better meet the needs of communities nationwide and would help to ensure that states and communities can compete for new awards. GEAR UP has demonstrated tremendous success with nearly 570,000 students across a diverse range of backgrounds in large cities, rural areas, and everywhere in between, and is currently active in 43 states across the nation. The proven model starts early in low-income middle schools and follows students through high school and into their
first year of college. By incorporating scholarship funds, expanding access to rigorous academic courses, tutoring, mentoring, financial literacy, and intensive college and career planning, GEAR UP builds college-going cultures in schools where even high school graduation cannot be taken for granted.

At a time of tight budgets, we have to invest every dollar responsibly. GEAR UP’s proven track record, as well as its critical role in building our economy, makes it a truly worthwhile investment.

Sincerely,

Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

John Cornyn  
United States Senator

/s/  
Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
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Tina Smith  
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Raphael Warnock  
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Sheldon Whitehouse  
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Ben Ray Luján  
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

Alex Padilla  
United States Senator

Chris Murphy  
United States Senator
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Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Bob Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Richard Durbin
United States Senator