



June 3, 2015

The Honorable Mark Leno
Chair, Conference Committee on the Budget
State Capitol, Room 5100
Sacramento, CA 95814



The Honorable Shirley Weber
Vice Chair, Conference Committee on the Budget
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Strengthening Cal Grants through the 2015-16 California State Budget

Dear Senator Mark Leno and Assemblymember Shirley Weber:

Californians for College Affordability is a coalition that works to strengthen California’s need-based financial aid programs so that all students can afford to attend and complete college, allowing the state’s workforce to remain competitive. Our top policy priorities for 2015 are to increase the number of Cal Grants available and to strengthen Cal Grant B, both of which would help low-income students across all types of colleges. As a coalition, we are grateful for the California Legislature’s commitment to college affordability and for the recent actions taken by both the Assembly and Senate Budget subcommittees to strengthen Cal Grants.

Investing in need-based financial aid is critical to improving college access and success, but it will only help if the investments are targeted at the low-income students who need them most. California needs an additional 2.3 million college graduates – predominantly certificates and associates degrees – by 2025 to remain competitive. This underscores the need for new financial aid spending to be inclusive of students at community colleges, which enroll the vast majority of low-income, Latino, and African-American students in the state. Yet hundreds of thousands of eligible students at all types of colleges are being turned away from the Cal Grant program every year, and increasing the number of grants available and the size of the Cal Grant B access award will help low-income students succeed at the institution of their choosing.

Without additional investments, hundreds of thousands of Californians will continue to be left behind each year. To address this, the most pressing financial aid priorities in the budget must be to:

- **Increase the number of annually authorized competitive Cal Grants.** California college students who meet Cal Grant income and academic requirements are guaranteed a Cal Grant if they are recent high

school graduates who meet the application deadline. But students who apply more than one year after high school graduation have to compete for just 22,500 competitive Cal Grants authorized each year. In 2014-15, there were 17 eligible applicants for each authorized grant. ***We urge the conference committee to increase the number of competitive awards by as many as fiscally possible.*** Given the extreme gap between available grants and eligible applicants, the Assembly Budget subcommittee's action to increase the number of grants to 50,000 is clearly warranted; the Senate's proposed 30,000 grants would also be a welcome boost to a program that has never seen an increase.

- **Increase the maximum Cal Grant B access award.** This award helps California's lowest income students cover essential non-tuition college costs, including books, supplies, and living expenses, which can exceed \$17,000 per year – more than the *total* income (\$16,500) of a typical Cal Grant B recipient. Thanks to previously chaptered legislation from Senator Kevin De León, the access award is already set to increase in 2015-16 from \$1,648 to \$1,656, just the second increase in the last decade. However, even with this increase the award remains insufficient to cover students' textbook and supply costs and holds less than a quarter of its original purchasing power, which would be more than \$6,000 today. The Assembly Budget subcommittee action to ***increase the maximum Cal Grant B access award to \$2,000*** is greatly needed and complementary to the Senate's previous actions.

Competitive Cal Grants and Cal Grant B access awards help the lowest income, least represented students in every college sector across California. Increasing the number of competitive awards and the size of the Cal Grant B access award are the two most effective financial aid investments the state can make to promote access, affordability, and success for students at all types of colleges. As leaders of the Conference Committee on the Budget, we urge you to fight to ensure that these priorities are reflected in the final budget that the Legislature sends to Governor Brown later this month.

Thank you for your consideration and your leadership.

Sincerely,

Bay Area Council
California Competes
California EDGE Coalition
Californians for Shared Prosperity Coalition
California State Conference of the NAACP
California State Student Association
EARN
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce
MALDEF
NAACP Los Angeles
Public Advocates Inc.
Southern California College Access Network
Student Senate for California Community Colleges
The Campaign for College Opportunity
The Education Trust-West
The Institute for College Access & Success
University of California Student Association
Young Invincibles

CC: Members, Conference Committee on the Budget
Members, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
Members, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee, Subcommittee 1 on Education
Members, Assembly Budget Committee
Members, Assembly Budget Committee, Subcommittee 2 on Education Finance
Members, Senate Education Committee
Members, Assembly Higher Education Committee
Members, Assembly Education Committee
Rick Simpson, Deputy Chief of Staff, Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins
Mónica Henestroza, Special Assistant to the Speaker, Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins
Joe Stephenshaw, Special Assistant to the Speaker, Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins
Kimberly Rodriguez, Principal Consultant, Senate President pro Tem Kevin de León

Please note: This letter was updated June 4, 2015 to include organizations that asked to sign the letter after it was initially submitted on June 3, 2015