



May 11, 2018

The Honorable Anthony J. Portantino
 Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee, Subcommittee 1 on Education
 State Capitol, Room 3086
 Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Strengthening California College Affordability by Increasing the Cal Grant B Access Award in the 2018-19 State Budget

Dear Chair Portantino:

[Californians for College Affordability](#) is a diverse coalition of higher education advocacy, civil rights, student leadership, workforce and business organizations that works to strengthen California’s need-based financial aid programs so that all students – regardless of income – can afford to attend and complete college. **We are writing in support of the California Student Aid Commission’s (CSAC) recommendation to increase the maximum Cal Grant B access award in the 2018-19 state Budget Act, so that more needy students across all types of colleges get the assistance they need to cover non-tuition college costs.**

Experts agree that California has a serious college affordability problem, and one that has a wide range of negative implications for California students, and low-income and underrepresented students in particular.

Unaffordable college costs can slow down or thwart students' ability to graduate, worsen equity gaps in college enrollment and completion, and leave students with burdensome debt. These are some of the findings of [Unpacking California College Affordability](#), a TICAS report exploring the views and priorities of two dozen higher education experts across the state. As documented in the report, every expert interviewed believed the state must do more to help financially needy students cover their total college costs beyond just tuition and fees.

A recent report from The Century Foundation (TCF), in consultation with CSAC, mapped out a bold plan for ensuring that all Californians could afford a college education in [Expanding Opportunity, Reducing Debt](#). After conferring with stakeholders and exploring available data, the report concluded that strengthening need-based aid for non-tuition costs is crucial to improving college affordability in California, and CSAC adopted a 2018-19 budget recommendation to increase the Cal Grant B access award as a result.

The Cal Grant B access award is the grant type that helps low-income students pay for non-tuition costs of college including books and supplies, transportation, and living expenses. Whereas Cal Grants covering statewide tuition costs have increased in lockstep with public university tuition over the decades, the Cal Grant B access award now holds just one-quarter its original purchasing power. The current maximum award is \$1,672, yet it would be over \$6,500 today had its value kept pace with inflation.

While there is tremendous unmet need among many of California's college students, even modest or incremental increases to the Cal Grant B access award would chip away at the problem, helping many more students at all types of colleges cross the academic finish line and be productive contributing members of the state's economy. With [low-income students](#) and [students of color](#) currently much more likely to graduate with debt than their better represented peers, providing additional need-based aid will also help to reduce the inequitable burdens of student loan debt on California's underserved students.

We thank you for your commitment to increasing college affordability and decreasing reliance on student loan debt in California, and urge you to increase the Cal Grant B access award through the 2018-19 state budget. Doing so will ensure that many more needy students receive more of the aid they need to get successfully to and through college.

Thank you for your consideration and your leadership.

Sincerely,

Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles
Bay Area Council
California Competes
California EDGE Coalition
California State Conference of the NAACP
Cal State Student Association
The Campaign for College Opportunity

College for All Coalition
The Education Trust-West
The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)
John Burton Advocates for Youth
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce
Lost Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation
MALDEF
NAACP Los Angeles
Public Advocates
Southern California College Access Network
Student Senate for California Community Colleges
uAspire
UnidosUS
University of California Student Association
Young Invincibles

CC: Members, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee, Subcommittee 1 on Education
Senator Holly J. Mitchell, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
Senator Toni G. Atkins, Senate President pro Tempore
Anita Lee, Consultant, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee, Subcommittee 1 on Education
Kimberly Rodriguez, Consultant, Senate President pro Tempore