



May 18, 2020

Dear Chair LaSata, Minority Vice Chair Irwin, Chair VanSingel and Minority Vice Chair Anthony:

We write as a group of policy, advocacy, research, philanthropic and membership organizations that work to put college within reach for all Michiganders to advocate for changes that will preserve student access to financial aid during this COVID-19 crisis. Higher education is imperative to weathering and recovering from any economic downturn. Sustaining funding for institutional aid and state scholarships will be crucial to Michigan's future prosperity. In addition to maintaining funding for higher education overall, we recommend the following policy changes to help students retain access to aid:

1. **Extend Eligibility for the Tuition Incentive Program (TIP) Deadline for Two Years.** In order to be eligible for the Tuition Incentive Program, or TIP, students must certify, or complete the Tuition Assistance Program application, no later than August 31st of the year they graduate from high school. In light of the crisis that is unfolding, and the uncertainty many students are experiencing about their futures, the eligibility date should be extended to August 31, 2022.
2. **Do not include terms in which students withdrew due to COVID-19 against financial aid limits.** Eligibility for the Michigan Competitive Scholarship is limited to ten semesters, and eligibility for the Michigan Tuition Grant expires after ten years. In line with federal CARES Act provisions that exempt incomplete terms against lifetime limits for federal aid programs, state financial aid

awards received during an incomplete term during the COVID-19 crisis should not count against students' lifetime aid limits.

3. **Allow financial aid applicants alternative ways of documenting academic merit requirements.** The Michigan Competitive Scholarship (MCS) requires applicants to meet a target score on a standardized college entrance exam to be eligible. Since those tests are not being offered this semester, students should not be penalized. Instead the state should establish a method for determining eligibility for MCS, such as allowing students to substitute GPA, that is fair and does not advantage students in some local educational agencies over others.
4. **Provide additional support to help students navigate financial aid challenges.** College and university financial aid offices are likely to be overwhelmed with requests from students this year. The state treasury should provide additional resources or capacity to institutions to help ensure that every student receives the individualized support that they are entitled to during this crisis.
5. **Redouble efforts to inform students about financial aid options.** Since high school students are no longer attending school in person, we recommend that the State Student Grants office launch an aggressive campaign to inform students about their financial aid options and what they need to do to take advantage of the aid available to them.

As Michigan continues to bear the severe social, economic, and health burdens brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to consider these recommendations and take the necessary budgetary and/or legislative steps to protect financial aid for students affected by the crisis. As partner organizations committed to improving access and success for postsecondary education, we stand ready to support and amplify the state's efforts in these areas.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Capital Area College Access Network
Council for a Strong America
Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce
The Education Trust-Midwest
The Institute for College Access & Success
Jamie and Denise Jacob Family Foundation
The Kresge Foundation
Lansing Area Economic Partnership
Michigan Association of State Universities
Michigan Center for Youth Justice

Michigan College Access Network
Michigan Community College Association
Michigan Economic Center
Michigan Independent Colleges & Universities
Michigan League for Public Policy
Michigan Student Financial Aid Association
Small Business Association of Michigan
The Skillman Foundation
Dan Collier, Research Fellow, WE Upjohn Institute
for Employment Research

CC: Brandy Johnson, Policy Advisor for Postsecondary Educational Attainment and Workforce Development, Office of Governor Whitmer
Michelle Richard, Deputy to the Senior Advisor for Michigan Prosperity, Department of Labor and Economic Development