



February 22, 2021

The Honorable John Laird
 Chair, California State Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee,
 Subcommittee 1 on Education
 State Capitol, Room 5019
 Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Increasing Competitive Cal Grants in the 2021-22 State Budget

Dear Chair Laird:

Californians for College Affordability is a diverse coalition of higher education advocacy, civil rights and social justice, business and workforce, and statewide student leadership organizations that are united in strengthening need-based financial aid in California so that all students can afford to attend and complete college, allowing the state’s workforce to remain competitive. Since 2012, Californians for College Affordability has advocated for state financial aid investments targeted to students who can afford the least, and expanding need-based financial aid to help more students and better cover total college costs.¹ In recent

¹ The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS). 2016. *How and Why to Improve Cal Grants: Key Facts and Recommendations*. https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy-files/pub_files/how_and_why_to_improve_cal_grants.pdf.

years, we have called attention to the need to reform – and adequately fund – the state Cal Grant program to solve for structural inequities that have negatively impacted low-income students, students of color, and nontraditional students.²

Unlike recent high school graduates, older students are not guaranteed a Cal Grant award. Instead, they “compete” for the opportunity to receive an award that can cover up to \$1,648³ of non-tuition college costs and/or a specified amount of tuition charges, depending on the students’ institution of choice. Thanks to investments made by the Legislature and Governor over recent years to increase the number of grants available, older students’ odds of receiving a grant have improved markedly: in 2014-15, older applicants had a 1-in-17 chance of receiving one of 22,500 annually available competitive awards, odds that had increased to 1-in-8 by the 2020-21 year during which 41,000 awards are available.⁴

Today we write in strong support of the Governor’s proposal to increase the number of competitive Cal Grant awards available annually to 50,000, which will help thousands more students obtain the credentials they – and the state – need to recover from the health and economic crises wrought by COVID-19. The pandemic has exacerbated already acute college affordability challenges for the most vulnerable Californians, and low-income communities and communities of color have been most impacted by un- and underemployment.⁵ Increasing the number of grants available will help to ensure more students – and the most under-resourced in particular – have the financial supports they need to successfully earn a credential.

We also encourage the Legislature to consider opportunities to increase financial aid for non-tuition college costs to address the crisis of basic needs insecurity among California’s college students, and to help mitigate additional COVID-related costs such as the need for broadband internet access and other technological supports. While the Cal Grant program has always provided some support for non-tuition costs, the current maximum base award of \$1,648 covers just nine percent of such costs, compared to 16 percent 20 years ago.⁶ Solving for the Cal Grant program’s structural inequities requires that more resources be put towards these awards, in addition to increasing the number of grants available.

To better connect under-resourced Californians with the supports they need *now* to access and succeed in higher education, we urge you to support the increase in the number of annually available competitive Cal Grants at the Senate Budget Subcommittee 1 hearing this Wednesday, February 24th. Doing so will ensure more low-income Californians have access to the state financial aid they need to enroll and be successful students, and contribute to a recovering – and once again thriving – state economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

² TICAS. 2019. *Charting the Course for Redesigning Financial Aid in California*. <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/charting-the-course.pdf>.

³ Since 2014-15, the maximum base Cal Grant B access award has been \$1,648, as established in the state budget. Additionally, funds from the College Access Tax Credit supplement the award; for AY 2020-21, this fund provided an additional \$8 per recipient, bringing the total to \$1,656.

⁴ TICAS calculations based on data provided in California Student Aid Commission operations memos, which cite the number of eligible applicants during both the March 2nd and September 2nd application cycles.

⁵ Public Policy Institute of California. 2020. *Income Inequality and Economic Opportunity in California*. <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/incoming-inequality-and-economic-opportunity-in-california-december-2020.pdf>.

⁶ TICAS calculations based on college cost data from College Insight; in 2000-01, the maximum Cal Grant B access award was \$1,548.

Sincerely,



Victoria "Nikki" Dominguez
Policy Director
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles



Jessie Ryan
Executive Vice President
The Campaign for College Opportunity



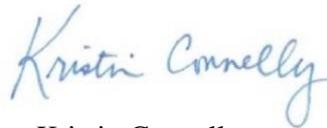
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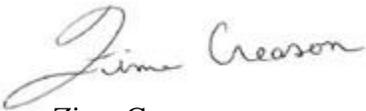
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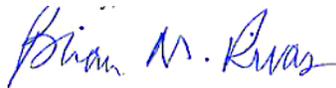
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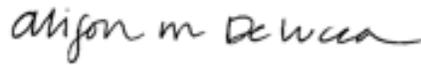
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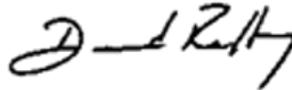
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