



July 9, 2021

The Honorable Connie Leyva  
 Chair, California State Senate Education Committee  
 State Capitol Room 2083  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 1456 (Medina, McCarty, Leyva): SUPPORT AS AMENDED APRIL 12, 2021**

Dear Chair Leyva:

As a diverse coalition of higher education advocacy, civil rights and social justice, business and workforce, and student leadership organizations united in strengthening state need-based financial aid so that all Californians can afford to successfully earn a higher education credential, **we write in strong support of AB 1456 (Medina, McCarty, Leyva), the Cal Grant Reform Act, as amended April 12, 2021. Now is a timely opportunity for AB 1456 to build upon the [recent historic budget investments to expand access to the Cal Grant program](#) by streamlining and simplifying it, removing barriers to Cal Grant access based on GPA, and ensuring that California’s least resourced students continue to be prioritized and supported through these investments. We are**

immensely appreciative that the state budget makes historic investments in expanding entitlement awards to all California community college (CCC) students, and we believe that AB 1456 is also needed to further address the program's additional structural issues that have perpetuated inequities in college access and success for students at all types of colleges, both before and throughout the pandemic.

Ensuring that all students receive the awards for which they are eligible remains an urgent priority for the state, as reflected in the budget's lifting of the time-out-of-high school and age restrictions on the Cal Grant for CCC students. **AB 1456 takes this milestone budget action one step further by removing GPA limitations for the lowest income CCC students (those eligible for the maximum federal Pell Grant).** With CCCs serving the majority of the state's students of color, these colleges play a critical role in closing equity gaps in higher education access and success. AB 1456 recognizes the racial equity imperative underlying expanding upon the state budget's immediate and intentional Cal Grant reform, and targeted investment in the new Cal Grant Equity Framework will ensure California's underserved students receive the supports they need to successfully earn a higher education credential that will facilitate their ability to thrive.

Additionally, AB 1456 takes important steps to ensure the access award does not drop below the current maximum of \$1,656. This amount covers just nine percent of students' non-tuition college costs today, which can exceed \$20,000 annually for many students across all types of colleges, and at least maintaining the award's value is a crucial step in moving towards covering students' total college costs. **We appreciate the inclusion of a much-needed automatic annual growth factor by tying the Cal Grant 2 (now the CCC entitlement) access award to the California Consumer Price Index to avoid the further decline in value that the award has experienced over the years – had the award kept pace with inflation it would be worth over \$7,000 today.**

Moreover, AB 1456 would build upon the state budget's historic investments and provide guidance for future investments and targeted implementation to close racial and socioeconomic equity gaps. **This bill provides an opportunity to streamline and simplify the Cal Grant program** by consolidating the multiple current Cal Grant awards into a Cal Grant 2 and Cal Grant 4 and aligning it with forthcoming changes to federal needs analysis.

**We applaud the steps that AB 1456 takes towards dismantling long standing structural issues that have kept too many students from receiving a Cal Grant.** The budget investments combined with the supporting changes that AB 1456 offers will make the Cal Grant program easier for students and families across the state to navigate, ultimately expanding college affordability for thousands of Californians.

**As conversations around Cal Grant reform continue** *we offer below key recommendations that would strengthen the proposal, further align it with stated intent, and ensure its equitable implementation:*

1. Access Award. **We strongly support AB 1456’s amended language that aims to protect the Cal Grant 2 (now the CCC entitlement) from dropping below the current maximum of \$1,656.** To meet the stated intent of this provision, legislative language should clarify that the access award is “no less than the maximum per-student amount provided in the 2020-21 award year” in section 70215(c)(1).

Moving forward, we also encourage consideration of an [even stronger growth adjustment](#) by tying the award to the actual changes in non-tuition college costs as identified by the institutions.

2. Equitable Eligibility Phase-In. **It is important to include in current intent language a timeline for providing Cal Grant 4 to at least all Pell Grant-eligible Cal Grant applicants to ensure that access expands as intended and does not erode over the years.** This is particularly critical because eligibility for Cal Grant 4 would employ lower federal poverty line thresholds than will be used for Pell Grant eligibility. Without a clear timeline for full parity, this delinking may make Cal Grant 4 more vulnerable to further eligibility reductions, especially during economic downturns.

As organizations that have been invested for many years in meaningfully strengthening and equitably reforming state need-based financial aid, we are excited for the future of the Cal Grant program and are grateful for the positive steps that the state is taking to address long standing structural inequities that have long impacted our state’s most vulnerable students and perpetuated disparities in college enrollment and completion. We see AB 1456 as an opportunity to continue the momentum and simplify and streamline the overly complex Cal Grant program, and are grateful to the authors and the California Student Aid Commission for championing Cal Grant reform that supports the needs of California’s low-income, underrepresented, older, and non-traditional students across all types of colleges – and in particular community colleges which serve most of the state’s low-income students and students of color. **We are pleased to support AB 1456, which is vital to eliminating barriers to state financial aid and ensuring the state’s economic path out of the pandemic is equitable, and respectfully urge the Senate Education Committee to consider our recommendations and vote AYE when the bill comes before you on July 14, 2021.**

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for all that you do to ensure all Californians have the support they – and the state – need to thrive.

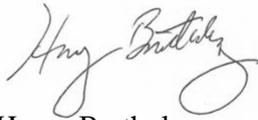
Sincerely,



Vanessa Aramayo  
Executive Director  
Alliance for a Better Community



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



Henry Bartholomay  
Policy Manager  
Bay Area Council



Dina Walker  
President & CEO  
BLU Educational Foundation



Su Jin Gatlin Jez  
Executive Director  
California Competes: Higher Education for  
a Strong Economy



Zima Creason  
Executive Director  
California EDGE Coalition



Vince Stewart  
Executive Director  
California STEM Network



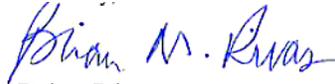
Ria Coen Gilbert  
Board of Directors Chairperson  
CALPIRG Students



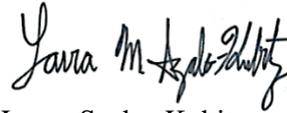
Jessie Ryan  
Executive Vice President  
The Campaign for College Opportunity



Vince Stewart  
Chief Impact & Program Officer  
Children Now



Brian Rivas  
Senior Director of Policy and Government  
Relations  
The Education Trust – West



Laura Szabo-Kubitz  
California Affordability Program Director  
The Institute for College Access & Success



Debbie Raucher  
Education Director  
John Burton Advocates for Youth



Anne Hawthorne  
Executive Director  
Los Angeles United Methodist Urban  
Foundation & Kid City Hope Place



Adrián Sandoval  
National PSP Director  
MALDEF



Eddie Kaufman  
Chief Executive Officer  
Mission Graduates



Meredith Curry  
Executive Director  
Northern California College Promise  
Coalition



David Palter  
Senior Director, Higher Education and  
Workforce Development  
Silicon Valley Leadership Group



Azucena Hernandez  
Co-Director of Community Transformation  
Promesa Boyle Heights



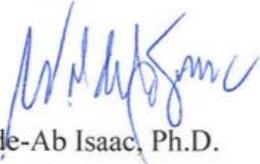
Tyler Wu  
California Policy Director  
uAspire



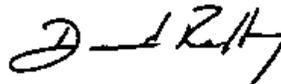
Jetaun Stevens  
Senior Staff Attorney  
Public Advocates



Amalia Chamorro  
Director of Education Policy  
UnidosUS



Wolde-Ab Isaac, Ph.D.  
Chancellor  
Riverside Community College District



David Rattray  
President & CEO  
UNITE-LA



Jose F. Torres  
Interim Chancellor  
San Bernardino Community College District



Kristin McGuire  
Western Region Director  
Young Invincibles

CC: Assemblymember Jose Medina  
Assemblymember Kevin McCarty  
Olgalilia Ramirez, Consultant, California State Senate Education Committee  
Members, California State Senate Education Committee  
Senator Toni G. Atkins, President pro Tempore, California State Senate  
Jennifer Pacella, Deputy Legislative Analyst, Legislative Analyst's Office  
Lande Ajose, Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education, Office of Governor Gavin  
Newsom  
Chris Ferguson, Program Budget Manager, California Department of Finance  
Marlene Garcia, Executive Director, California Student Aid Commission