

Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Republican Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

February 11, 2022

Dear Chairs Leahy and DeLauro, Vice Chair Shelby, and Ranking Member Granger:

As you work to finalize the fiscal year 2022 federal spending bills, we write to urge you to make a bold investment in evidence-based college completion initiatives. While our country has made substantial advancements in high school graduation and college-going levels over the last two decades, the percentage of students who receive a college degree has been largely stagnant, with only about six in ten of students earning a degree after six years. Large racial gaps in completion persist.

The pandemic has exacerbated these trends. Nationally, college enrollment has declined by more than one million students, or 6.6%, over the last two years. This represents the biggest drop in college enrollment in 50 years. Underserved students have been disproportionately affected.

In the absence of policy reforms focusing on getting students both to and through college, the devastating effects of stagnant completion rates will have long standing ramifications for students, their families, regional and national economies, and for future generations. Nearly every state has a goal to boost the share of the population with education beyond high school so they can compete in the increasingly high-skill economy. States will fail to meet their goals without greater investment in support for students facing the highest hurdles. While college completion strategies like comprehensive approaches to student success, high quality tutoring, and emergency financial aid involve upfront cost, they pay for themselves in economic activity. A federal investment in evidence-based strategies for boosting college completion would be a high-return investment in the U.S. workforce and our global competitiveness.

Our country needs a solution that matches the scale of the problem. Evidence-based college completion programs can double the college graduation rate for participants who are largely students of color, low-income, and first-generation students. Research has demonstrated that an array of completion programs have yielded large and statistically significant impacts on college persistence, college graduation, and earnings after graduation over the long term, and many other programs have rigorous studies underway. That's why President Biden, the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Senate have all proposed investing in such programs through the American Families Plan, Build Back Better, and other legislative efforts. We urge you to make an ambitious investment in college completion that would

help the hundreds of thousands of students who lack the support they need to get across the college finish line.

Most immediately, Congress has the opportunity to fund evidence-based college completion through a FY22 appropriations bill. The urgent problem of low college completion demands bold, immediate action, and we hope you will act soon to pass a FY22 appropriations bill that includes the Senate-proposed \$15 million dollar investment in Postsecondary Student Success Grants for direct funding towards evidence-based solutions.

Sincerely,

America Forward
American Federation of Teachers
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)
Center for American Progress
Education Reform Now
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)
The Education Trust
The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)
National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs
New America Higher Education Program
Results for America
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)
Third Way
UnidosUS