May 15, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Thank you for your swift, bipartisan action to respond to the health and economic impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). As you prepare for a fourth economic relief package, we respectfully request significant funding to be allocated to Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) to support vulnerable students and their families impacted by the virus.

COVID-19 has disrupted the learning of millions of students. From in-person classroom closures to the cancellation of essential after-school programs, students across the nation have lost invaluable and formative academic experiences. These students are missing out on more than graduation ceremonies and exams; their academic and personal lives have been destabilized, and their career prospects have been shaken. Many students are in dire need of immediate, comprehensive support during this time of academic and economic uncertainty.

Low-income students, students with disabilities, first-generation students, youth who are homeless, have limited English proficiency, and who are in foster care, students in rural communities, and military veterans all already face greater obstacles to their learning experiences and now are often encountering a more substantial impact from COVID-19. These students are at risk of falling through the cracks of our system and permanently losing a chance to pursue higher levels of education.

TRIO programs help ensure that these vulnerable students receive the support they need to progress through the academic pipeline. Through a set of outreach and student services programs, TRIO works to mitigate existing disparities in access and assistance for students. Their programs not only enrich individuals academically, but they also strengthen our workforce’s economic prospects by empowering more people to earn high school diplomas and post-secondary degrees. The assistance that TRIO program professionals can provide to these students is even more necessary during the pandemic.

A significant increase in overall program capacity would allow significantly more vulnerable students to receive support that is critical to their success and to the economy’s revival, such as academic tutoring and counseling; financial literacy programs; assistance with postsecondary planning, college admissions applications, and career counseling; peer and adult mentoring;
work-study opportunities; and connections to wrap-around services that make high school and college completion more likely.

We thank you for your support of these vital programs for our nation’s most vulnerable students and their families, and we look forward to working with you on the next relief bill to ensure our most vulnerable students are supported.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

/s/ Susan M. Collins
Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

/s/ Lisa Murkowski
Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

/s/ Jon Tester
Jon Tester
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Mike Crapo
Mike Crapo
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Thom Tillis
Thom Tillis
United States Senator

/s/ Brian Schatz
Brian Schatz
United States Senator

/s/ James E. Risch
James E. Risch
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ John Boozman
John Boozman
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

/s/ John Cornyn
John Cornyn
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith
Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Martha McSally
Martha McSally
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator
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