

This letter is to request the aid of the Oregon Congressional delegation in securing financial assistance to help students at community colleges and the institutions who serve them through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community college students already face unacceptably high rates of housing and food insecurity and shouldering this existential threat to life and livelihood will make their circumstances even more precarious.

The social distancing required to combat the virus will likely lead to monumental declines in community college enrollment, forcing mass layoffs for many faculty as fewer courses are needed to meet the demand. This will have a profound effect on the lives and livelihoods of those employees, the institutions, and their communities. In rural areas, community colleges are often among the largest employers in a community. Moreover, colleges are an indispensable pipeline for critical workforce needs, and specifically those which are critical to fighting the COVID-19 such as health care and transportation.

As we saw in the Great Recession, community colleges will also be essential to rebuilding the economy as displaced workers look for new skills and employment. To this end we ask for your support in the following areas:

1. Protect Students from Student-Aid Disruptions and Provide Emergency Financial Assistance:

Regulatory and enforcement relief will be critical to ensure students retain their financial aid support as enrollment, work status, and other conditions change. Second, authorize grants to students impacted by the COVID-19 to assist in payment of unexpected expenses related to the virus. This aid should be flexible in eligibility (beyond Pell-eligible students) and allowable expenses. Colleges also support the expansion of SNAP and other benefits that are critical lifelines to our low and moderate-income students facing negative impacts from economic and employment changes.

2. Smooth Financial Disruptions to Tuition-Dependent Community Colleges:

Emergency stop-gap funding to institutions to help maintain operations through remote learning and telework is critical to offset potentially unprecedented tuition, fee, and critical support and wrap-around service losses.

3. Educational/Workplace Recovery Grants to Convert to Distance Learning or Telework:

Federal funding to help cover the costs associated with institutions converting course delivery to distance learning modality. Anticipated costs include: IT support for faculty and other technical assistance for instructional shift to remote delivery; accommodation adjustments for students who may not be able to access disability services on campus; ensuring students have appropriate technology and access to computers and internet services; and costs associated with converting

employees to telework if necessary to perform their job function.

4. Federal Paid Sick and Family Medical Leave: The passage of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R. 6201) will impact our colleges at a time when they are seeing revenues dramatically decline and reserves depleted. Federal appropriations to states should include a set-aside or flexibility to provide direct support to community colleges to assist faculty and staff utilizing this important benefit package.

Community colleges are already taking significant steps to stop the spread of the virus and to keep our communities safe. Colleges have implemented social distancing and are moving to offer courses online for some or all of spring term. For many career and technical programs (CTE), which require face-to-face hands-on instruction, they will not be able to be offered unless the programs are deemed essential. Such disruptions will disrupt the education for students, the workforce pipeline for communities, and the finances of tuition-dependent institutions.

We greatly appreciate the scope of the challenge before all of us and thank you for your unwavering leadership throughout this crisis. Community colleges stand ready to engage in finding the solutions to help navigate out of this crisis and to help our students, employees, and communities recover in its aftermath. Thank you for your efforts on behalf of all Oregonians.

Sincerely,

John Wykoff
Deputy Director
Oregon Community College Association