

April 14, 2020

Dear Senator Merkley,

The CARES Act provided help to Oregon's college students at a time when our communities needed it most. We applaud your efforts to pass this act while ensuring that higher education was included. All 17 community colleges in Oregon have moved the vast majority of our courses online as well as offering remote tutoring services, mental health counseling, academic advising, and financial aid services. The CARES Act will provide additional resources for students so they can continue their education. Staying enrolled means that our students can stay on their educational pathway.

Even with our collective effort, enrollment has dropped statewide, denying thousands of students support during this difficult time. As we look to a possible fourth stimulus package, we are asking for your support to help backfill our ongoing funding loss due to a significant drop in enrollment and the costs associated with a total conversion to online/remote learning. Additional funding support for our colleges would enable us to engage more students and build a workforce that is ready to meet the new challenges in front of us.

Oregon community colleges are starting to report double-digit enrollment declines due to COVID-19. Students are citing job loss, an inability to pay for rent, and overall uncertainty. And, while there has been a tremendous amount of creativity and innovation in moving classroom courses to an online format, there are some classes that simply cannot be taught without face to face instruction. This has led to a projected \$50 billion in lost revenue and increased costs for higher education nationwide, according to our higher education associations. The CARES Act will be extremely helpful for this current quarter and as we make decisions now for future quarters, we anticipate additional needs. We believe colleges will still need the remaining \$36 billion that has yet to be funded.

In addition to the much needed backfill we ask you to consider these three funding proposals.

1. Appropriate \$2 billion (\$500 million for each of four fiscal years) for the next iteration of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program.

This would build on the highly successful previous TAACCCT grant infrastructure that produced over 2,600 new programs in high wage fields and impacted over 60% of America's community and technical colleges. Such a program could also develop the workforce needed for strategic investments, such as a large infrastructure bill or a pandemic-related healthcare workforce initiative. Ideally this program would address both credit and non-credit programs offered by public community colleges (as defined by the HEA). The TAACCCT grant was focused on the unique role that community colleges play in addressing evolving workforce needs and created lasting partnerships with employers nationwide. Grant funding would encourage funding partnerships within and across federal agencies to serve low-skilled adults in innovative ways (e.g., Integrated Education and Training where ESL/Basic Skills education is integrated with CTE). We'd ask that these funds be allocated to public community colleges, as defined by the HEA and allow us to continue the tradition of TAACCCT programs being developed for local needs (e.g., urban, rural, territories, outlying areas, etc.).

2. Increase the budget of the National Science Foundation Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program from \$75 million to \$150 million. With an emphasis on two-year Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), this program focuses on the education of technicians for the high-technology fields.

The additional funding would promote a post-pandemic economic recovery by bringing research and development, workforce education and industry into new partnerships that foster equitable economic



development and a workforce prepared to contribute to the growth of advanced technological sectors. The ATE grant has been one of the greatest investments in STEM education nationally and has harnessed the powerful ingenuity of our faculty as leaders in their fields. As an example, we anticipate that many colleges would use these funds to advance high-technology training in the healthcare field.

3. We recommend that the HEA be amended to establish a \$500 million grant program to advance “benefits integration” and other initiatives that connect the large number of college students with significant basic needs to federal assistance programs. This investment should establish a federal office, within the US Department of Education, that aligns education-related public benefits policies across multiple federal agencies. This new office would provide technical assistance and policy coordination, something that Oregon has fostered locally through our community college’s Pathways to Opportunity initiative.

College students experience high rates of housing and food insecurity and these conditions will be exacerbated by COVID 19. In November of 2016, six federal agencies published a federal interagency letter, outlining how federal benefits can be better aligned for postsecondary access and completion. Since that time, the Oregon community colleges launched an initiative called “Pathways to Opportunity” (PTO) to implement these recommendations for improving access to public benefits for community college students and establish strategic partnerships with the Department of Human Services and the Oregon Employment Department.

The current statewide PTO program is not permanent; it is a temporary commitment of all 17 college presidents to think beyond the Pell Grant and find every tool we can to help students. Oregon’s PTO program leverages federal and philanthropic dollars and has allowed us to scale programs like SNAP Education and Training statewide. Through these efforts PTO has efficiently routed an additional \$4.9M to students and families in need in the last 2 years alone. These are new resources for Oregon to enroll new families in education and training programs that will end cycles of poverty. Just this week Oregon community colleges were able to keep some vulnerable students enrolled, because we coordinated with DHS to provide wrap around services in addition to their Pell eligibility.

Oregon’s community colleges are the center of where people learn, find community, and get help because we are a trusted source for services. Please consider these requests and advocate with us for these funds so our students are met with open doors to their futures, especially during this time of uncertainty.

Thank you,

Cam Preus  
Executive Director  
Oregon Community College Association