



May 27, 2020

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

The Honorable Holly J. Mitchell  
Chair, California State Senate  
Budget and Fiscal Review Committee  
State Capitol, Room 5019  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Kevin McCarty  
Chair, California State Assembly  
Committee on Budget,  
Subcommittee 2 on Education Finance  
State Capitol, Room 2136  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Richard D. Roth  
Chair, California State Senate  
Budget and Fiscal Review Committee,  
Subcommittee 1 on Education  
State Capitol, Room 2080  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Jose Medina  
Chair, California State Assembly  
Committee on Higher Education  
1020 N Street, Room 173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Philip Y. Ting  
Chair, California State Assembly  
Committee on Budget  
State Capitol, Room 6026  
Sacramento, CA 95814

## **RE: Targeted Reforms in Budget Trailer Bill Language to Protect Students' Financial Aid During Ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic**

Dear Chair Leyva, Chair McCarty, Chair Medina, Chair Mitchell, Chair Roth, and Chair Ting:

[Californians for College Affordability](#) is a diverse coalition of higher education advocacy, civil rights and social justice, business and workforce, and statewide student leadership organizations that are united in strengthening need-based financial aid in California so that all students can afford to attend and complete college, allowing the state's workforce to remain competitive. Since 2012, Californians for College Affordability has advocated for increased state investments that ensure state financial aid enables students to attend full time and complete a meaningful credential, and protects those with the least resources from shouldering the biggest burden of college costs and debt. **During the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic, we urge California policymakers to use the opportunity presented by the budget to ensure that the crisis does not undermine students' eligibility for available financial aid.**

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, California's students – and [lower income students in particular](#) – [struggled with college costs](#) and [basic needs](#), and this crisis has made things far worse. With non-tuition costs, like books and living expenses, alone [exceeding \\$20,000 annually](#) across all types of colleges, investments in higher education – and need-based financial aid and the Cal Grant program specifically – are all the more critical in ensuring students have access to truly equitable, affordable college opportunities.

We understand the constraints that the Legislature is under as it works to craft a 2020-21 state budget amidst the fallout from COVID-19, and [we commend your dedication](#) over the years to protecting California's most vulnerable students. We appreciate that Governor Newsom's recent May budget revision protected financial aid investments, as doing so in the Great Recession helped blunt the impact of rising college costs on the state's low- and middle-income students.

**In addition to shielding Cal Grants from cuts that would devastate under-resourced Californians, there are several narrow reforms that the Legislature can enact through budget trailer bill language to [help protect current financial aid recipients](#) during COVID-19, including steps that mirror provisions in the recently enacted federal CARES Act.** Targeted, time-limited reforms, alongside language expressing clear legislative intent to protect students' financial aid through the pandemic, would help to ensure that the crisis does not jeopardize students' ability to pay for college even more than the economic crisis already has. **Specifically, we urge you to:**


- Conform Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) definitions to quickly changing federal definitions and require the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) to promulgate emergency regulations pertaining to GPA calculations;
- Extend by one year the time period during which eligible applicants can receive a California Community College (CCC) Transfer Entitlement Cal Grant;
- Waive return of financial aid to both CSAC and the state when students are unable to complete due to COVID-19;
- Waive community service requirements during states of emergency for California Dreamer Service Incentive Grant Program recipients; and

- Extend lifetime award limits for students affected by withdrawals and non-completion due to COVID-19.

As we weather the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we look forward to working together with you and the Governor to enact a budget with targeted reforms and equity-focused investments that protects the state’s most vulnerable students and ensures the least resourced Californians receive the supports they need. Doing so will allow under-resourced Californians to ride out this pandemic and successfully earn the higher education credentials that enable them – and the state – to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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Education Equity Director  
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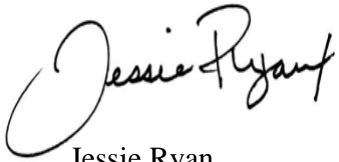
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Statewide Board Chair  
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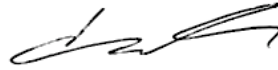
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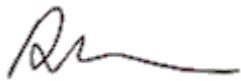
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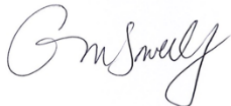
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CC: Senator Toni G. Atkins, Senate President pro Tempore  
Assemblymember Anthony Rendon, Speaker of the Assembly  
Lande Ajose, Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom  
Chris Ferguson, Assistant Program Budget Manager, California Department of Finance  
Jennifer Pacella, Deputy Legislative Analyst, Legislative Analyst's Office

*This letter was updated on June 10, 2020 to reflect additional cosignatories.*