



September 21, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and  
Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and  
Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scott  
Chair  
Committee on Education and Labor  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Education and Labor  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Chairman Scott, and Ranking Member Foxx:

As Congress further considers the Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Reconciliation package, we write as presidents of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) Association to express our strong support for the inclusion of a new \$9 billion Retention and Completion Grant program in the House Education and Labor Committee bill and urge a critical improvement in the design of the program as the legislative process moves forward. Our organizations each have a variety of priorities within the budget reconciliation package, but this new program is an area of shared interest.

This first-of-its-kind federal investment would complement existing higher education programs focused on access and affordability, and boost the likelihood of students completing their degree program and successfully transitioning into the workforce. While it is far less than the \$62 billion program called for in President Biden's American Families Plan, it still represents a significant investment in student success, providing access to supports such as academic transition and support services, emergency financial aid, and other key assistance.

One provision within the House bill, however, is of particular concern. As currently written, only states that choose to participate in the free community college program would be eligible to participate in the Retention and Completion Grant program. We strongly believe students who live in states that choose not to participate in the free community college program should not be left out of this program. This provision could result in millions of America's college students—including low-income students and students of color—being denied key support services to help them complete college in a timely manner and hinder efforts to graduate more college students, close equity gaps, and meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

We urge you to maintain funding for the Retention and Completion Grant program as the bill moves forward and ensure that students in all states may benefit from this essential program. Please let us know how we can further be a resource, including support for the enactment of this important proposal.

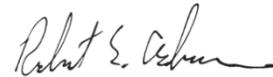
Thank you,



Mildred García, Ed.D.  
President  
American Association of  
State Colleges and  
Universities



Peter McPherson  
President  
Association of Public and  
Land-grant Universities



Robert E. Anderson, Ph.D.  
President  
State Higher Education  
Executive Officers  
Association