

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Subcommittee
on Labor-H-Education Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
U.S. House Subcommittee
on Labor-H-Education Appropriations
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy E. Blunt
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Subcommittee
on Labor-H-Education Appropriations
260 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
U.S. House Subcommittee
on Labor-H-Education Appropriations
2207 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

August 11th, 2021

Dear esteemed Members of Congress:

On behalf of our faculty and staff members across hundreds of institutions, we write to thank you for your historic investments in higher education over the course of the past year, and to ask for further support in the American Families Plan's free college proposal.

Across the country, funding provided by the CARES Act and subsequent COVID-19 relief bills have stopped the worst financial impacts from hitting our campus communities. However, as appreciated as the unprecedented \$135 billion has been, faculty and staff have not shared in all the benefits of these investments – to the detriment of the student experience.

Faculty and staff working conditions are student learning conditions. And today, because of generations of state disinvestment from public higher education, the overwhelming majority of college faculty -- almost 75 percent--are employed on a temporary or part-time basis. They are a gig workforce, and the precarity of their work lives has direct negative impacts on students. As explained by the University of Southern California's Pullias Center for Higher Education, "the committed educators comprising the non-tenure-track faculty ranks – sometimes referred to as adjuncts, clinical, or contingent faculty – are not to blame for... adverse effects on student learning. Rather, poor working conditions and a lack of support diminish their capacity to provide a high-quality learning environment and experience for students."¹

We urge you today to take steps in future funding and economic recovery bills to protect faculty and staff job security, ensure high-quality instruction for students, and promote shared governance.

¹ <https://pullias.usc.edu/delphi/resources/#make>

The twin crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout have hit college campuses in unique ways. In spring 2020, experts were predicting there could be up to a 20 percent drop in enrollment at four-year institutions,² causing panic across administrations. In the period after the CARES Act's passage, college administrations were alarmed by the projected enrollment losses, reopening and remote learning costs, and uncertainty of further federal assistance. Institutions rolled out austerity plans to dramatically cut operating expenses without adequate input from the campus community. As of February 2021, more than 650,000 university employees have lost their jobs;³ research by the American Association of University Professors indicates that about 20 percent of institutions have laid off or denied contract renewal for contingent faculty this past year.⁴ That national trend has had disastrous effects on colleges and their wider communities. The City University of New York's faculty and staff union sued the university for not reappointing around 2,800 employees or giving adequate back pay and benefits.⁵ The University of Arizona cut 250 positions over the summer, and implemented partial furloughs for most other faculty and staff.⁶ The University of Akron cut 178 employees, after projecting a 20 percent cut in state funding and invoking a "force majeure" clause in its collective bargaining contract.⁷ The University of Vermont cut 23 programs, and started firing longtime lecturers and tenured faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences, the largest and most profitable unit at the university.⁸

This is just a sampling of the many stories we have heard from our colleagues – and they speak to an urgent need to invest in our institutions in a way that also protects the employees who do the work. According to analysis by the *Washington Post*, the lowest-paid university employees are facing the highest rates of job loss and furlough.⁹ Our national networks of campus-based chapters and locals have grown over the last year as a direct result of these moves toward austerity.¹⁰

We all know the transformative power that a college degree can have in a student's life. Higher education holds the promise of undoing long-standing racial injustices and socioeconomic barriers; unequal access and funding for higher education can exacerbate these problems rather than ameliorating them. Realizing the promise of higher education requires not just adding money to the system, but targeting it to support the work of the university employees who are the first points of contact with students. If our country is going to fully recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic, our leaders must use the historic levels of education funding proposed by the President in ways that support student success and the creation of good-paying, union jobs for faculty and staff.

Our organizations have all called, in one way or another, for Congress to double Pell grant funding, increase grant funding to institutions, and create a federal-state partnership to reduce college costs. We greatly appreciate your support for these initiatives so far, and we urge you to take the next step to add guardrails to ensure this money is used in ways that support the people who do the work on America's college campuses. We ask that you to consider the following for the FY22 federal budget, and future

² <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2020/04/29/colleges-could-lose-20-percent-students-analysis-says>

³ <https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-brutal-tally-higher-ed-lost-650-000-jobs-last-year>

⁴ <https://www.aaup.org/news/aaup-report-highlights-need-action-crisis-exacerbated-pandemic#.YQQ1ao5Kg2w>

⁵ <https://psc-cuny.org/news-events/psc-sues-cuny-fights-layoffs>

⁶ <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-education/2020/07/15/university-arizona-eliminates-250-jobs-citing-covid-19/5436313002/>

⁷ <https://www.beaconjournal.com/story/news/2020/10/04/faculty-trust-eroded-after-university-akron-layoffs-covid-19-higher-education/5890230002/>

⁸ <https://vtdigger.org/2021/01/12/theyre-running-it-like-a-business-as-more-cuts-loom-uvm-faculty-debate-the-mission/>

⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/11/17/higher-ed-job-loss/>

¹⁰ <https://www.chronicle.com/article/will-covid-19-revive-faculty-power?>

legislation to drive economic recovery and to create free college programs, such as the American Families Plan:

1. **Protect faculty and staff job security** by setting a baseline of support for campus workers as a condition of accepting new streams of federal free college funding. Beyond supporting an increase in the share of faculty on the tenure track, where applicable, positions on college campuses should provide a guarantee of good pay, continuity of employment, and parity in wages and benefits between full and part time roles. Institutions should work as much as possible to convert existing short-term appointments of employees to longer-term or tenure-track appointments. Gig work erodes the foundation that has made American higher education among the greatest in the world.
2. **Ensure high-quality instruction for students** by requiring that new funds be used mostly for post-enrollment instructional spending and student support services. Legislation should require states to keep skin in the game by demanding, at minimum, a maintenance of effort by states for per-student and instructional spending. Furthermore, funds should support a free college education at all public institutions, not only at community colleges.
3. **Promote shared governance** by making clear in bill and report language that federal emergency funding ought to fill payroll budget shortfalls ahead of administrative costs or debt financing, and that faculty and staff must have meaningful input when administrations seek to cut costs in moments of financial uncertainty, or in starting a partnership with an outside company. If a decision is made to hire an outside company for facilities management, instruction, or student services, the employees of those companies should receive the same benefits and workplace protections as staff formally on institutional payroll.

We would again like to thank you for your generous and historic funding to meet the needs of students and institutions of higher education during the pandemic. We look forward to working with you further to help our institutions recover from the pandemic, strengthen our communities and civil society, and create thousands more good-paying, union jobs in the process.

Sincerely,

American Association of University Professors (AAUP)
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
Communication Workers of America (CWA)
National Education Association (NEA)
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

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