



March 20, 2020

Dear Colorado Congressional Delegation,

We write to voice our concerns over the evolving threat posed by the coronavirus (COVID-19) to our collective Colorado higher education community. We are grateful for Congress's swift, bipartisan efforts to provide support for vital health care services and economic relief. Colorado's colleges, universities, and higher education centers are among the growing list of entities negatively impacted as we swiftly enact policies in the best interest of our students, faculty, and staff.

Following advice from local, state, and federal public health officials, our institutions have transitioned to remote learning and teaching for the duration of this academic year to combat the transmission of COVID-19 on our campuses and communities. This shift towards off-site and off-campus operations presents challenges as we work to fulfill our academic, research, and public service missions.

As our congressional delegation, we ask you to continue to work with our institutions as Congress identifies ways to address both the immediate burdens, and the long-term impacts to our students, institutions and communities. We fully recognize the new normal that will result from COVID-19 and its impact to the global economy and everyday life. With the investments outlined below, our institutions are committed to innovating and infusing our collective talents in research and workforce training into the important recovery efforts that lie ahead.

Emergency Aid to Students and Institutions

The impact of COVID-19 on our students and universities has been profound. While every student has experienced challenges during this uncertain period, there are students who are most impacted by efforts to move to remote instruction or campus closures. We are concerned these students, who may be low-income, homeless, or foster youth, will struggle to meet their basic needs, which include housing, transportation, food, and medical care, without direct on-campus support. It is critical the federal government help institutions ensure our most vulnerable students are not harmed as a result of efforts to protect them from COVID-19.

The financial impacts of COVID-19 on our colleges and universities includes lost revenue-refunds/credits of room, board and other fees due to closure or moving instruction online – as well as potential foregone revenue due to reduced enrollments. We project the refunds/credits for room and board for all public higher education institutions in Colorado could reach \$100 million. Institutions are also facing increased expenses as we struggle to provide the necessary support to our students as they

address challenges such as lack of affordable housing and food insecurity. The impact of the economic downturn on state revenues and, in turn, the ability of states to increase general fund appropriations to assist our institutions and our students at this critical time or even in the foreseeable future severely impacts our institutions. We encourage policy makers to include language encouraging states to continue prioritizing funding for elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education and to work to minimize funding reductions to these important programs.

Although, the full scope of the situation is unknown, a federal program providing grant support to reimburse institutions with demonstrable operating losses during this time would help our colleges and universities serve our students and communities. **We propose the federal government disburse direct support to students and institutions through the already existing Pell Grant disbursement system.** This has the advantage of allowing for greatly needed rapid disbursement of funding. We propose the grant funding be distributed to each institution based on a calculation of enrollment (which could include FTE, the number of Pell recipients, etc.). **Of those funds, at least 25 percent would be given as direct emergency aid to students, with a maximum award of \$1,500.** The remaining funds may be used by institutions to address the unique situations they face – provided the funds are used to address revenue losses or additional expenses necessitated by COVID-19.

Technology Implementation Fund

Shifting to remote instruction poses challenges for campuses, however it remains the safest way to serve students. Many institutions, even those with robust online learning tools, lack the capacity to rapidly transition to an exclusively distance education model. This is especially true at traditionally lower-resourced institutions such as community colleges, minority-serving institutions, and institutions with a high percentage of Pell recipients. **We request the federal government provide grant funding in the amount of \$7.8 billion to ensure higher education institutions are supported in the transition to distance learning.** Our institutions are committed to innovation, and adapting to the current rapidly evolving environment, building off what we learn to create even more effective and efficient education delivery models in the future.

Supplemental Research Funding

Salaries for graduate students, post-doctoral researchers and other laboratory technicians are often fully funded by federal grants. Personnel can only be paid a salary from such grants if they are performing duties related to these grants. Transitioning off campus and narrowing research activities considerably due to safety considerations will present challenges to these critical members of our campuses. **We request Congress provide supplemental appropriations to research agencies equal to 15 percent of their extramural research budgets in Fiscal Year 2020, so they can provide emergency paid leave for grant personnel, as well as ramp-up costs for COVID-19-related research.** We also request additional regulatory flexibility across federal agencies, allowing our institutions to focus on responding to the spread of COVID-19.

Access to Low-Cost Capital

The financial consequences of this pandemic for institutions of higher education – both public and private - is historic and getting colleges back on their feet is of national importance. Access to affordable capital is a necessary lifeline for institutions, and the communities they serve, if they are to weather the storm and return to normal operations.

Debt service payments are a significant expense for all institutions. While all institutions continue to prioritize this expense, lost auxiliary revenue will strain the ability of institutions to cover this cost without putting other campus needs at risk. **We request the federal government provide our**

institutions with access to zero-interest refinancing and zero-interest loans, along with additional tax measures – such as the restoration of Advanced Refunding Bonds – so that we can redirect resources currently used for debt service to support other aspects of our daily operations.

We are extremely appreciative of the Colorado congressional delegation's national leadership, as well as your support for our students and institutions during this unprecedented public health crisis. Please do not hesitate to let us know if we can provide additional information or resources.

Sincerely,

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Angie Paccoine, Executive Director, *Colorado Department of Higher Education*
Tony Frank, President, *Colorado State University System*
Leah L. Bornstein, President, *Aims Community College*
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