

--- Council of --- Regional Accrediting Commissions

September 1, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer,

As Chair of the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC), I am writing with respect to current negotiations on a new COVID-19 recovery package. The funds previously provided to students and institutions of higher education under the CARES Act took a critical step to help mitigate the impact of this ongoing crisis on our nation's education system. However, given current circumstances and the continued ramifications of the pandemic, much more must be done to support quality postsecondary opportunities for students and bolster our higher education system.

As accreditors of roughly 3,000 colleges and universities, we continue to work tirelessly to help ensure institutions continue to live up to the quality standards established by each of our respective commissions in alignment with the Higher Education Act. Collectively, we have [increased monitoring institutions](#), developed protocols for remote and/or virtual reviews of institutions and have conducted surveys to better understand the issues facing colleges. We have also set clear expectations that institutions must gain approval through the regular accreditation process to offer distance education programs beyond the current flexibilities provided by the U.S. Department of Education.

These efforts, combined with our continued engagement and interactions with institutional leaders from around the country, have provided us with a deeper understanding of the needs of colleges and universities as they prepare for the new academic year. First and foremost, institutions need access to the resources to meet students' needs and to mitigate the financial duress that institutions are facing as a result of the pandemic. These resources will allow

institutions to safely offer in-person educational programs where possible and support high-quality learning opportunities and services for students in circumstances where remote or hybrid approaches are necessary.

We are grateful that current proposals indicate bipartisan recognition that more funds must be provided to support these critical needs so students can continue to pursue valuable postsecondary opportunities despite the current state of affairs. We strongly urge you to follow the specific recommendations outlined by the American Council of Education (ACE) in a recent [letter](#) to Congress.

We are also pleased there appears to be bipartisan agreement on the importance of addressing accessibility and connectivity issues. If students are unable to attend classes in person, those who do not have access to adequate broadband internet access will be left behind, which is unacceptable and could potentially have long-term negative outcomes for our nation. We would be remiss not to emphasize that broadband connectivity is an issue that affects students in rural as well as urban settings, and also is potentially particularly devastating to students with disabilities, from poor and underserved communities, and households with multiple learners trying to study simultaneously. We urge you to please include as part of any new relief package sufficient funding to help expand affordable broadband access and connectivity to all students, access that is critical to the delivery of high-quality distance education programs.

Again, thank you for your commitment to supporting students and institutions through these challenging times. We remain committed to working with you and your colleagues to ensure any upcoming supplemental legislation provides support that is meaningful to students, families and institutions. We appreciate your attention to the concerns outlined in this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Belle S. Wheelan". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a large, stylized 'B' and 'W'.

Belle S. Wheelan, Ph.D.
Chair, Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions
President, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)