March 27, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations
260 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

We write to thank you for your strong support of the Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) and to request that you continue to provide robust funding for these programs in the fiscal year (FY) 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill. For the last several years, your Subcommittee has provided historic levels of support for the TRIO programs and the low-income, first-generation students they serve. As you prepare your FY 2021 appropriations bill, we ask that, once again, you prioritize the academic, financial, and social support services provided by TRIO and reject any proposals to consolidate, significantly change, or eliminate any of these programs.

TRIO helps to ensure that all students have equal access to a college education. The programs provide supports that help students prepare for, persist in, and graduate from higher education programs. Nationally, students from the lowest-income families are five times less likely to earn college degrees than those from the highest-income families. Thanks to TRIO, many low-income and first-generation students are able to change this trajectory and chart a new path.

During FY 2021, the Department of Education will host the next grant competitions for TRIO’s Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) programs. Each of these programs provides pre-college assistance for students who would become the first in their families to earn a college degree.

The Talent Search program works with students in middle and high school to provide early exposure to the college and financial aid application processes. The program provides hands-on supports to help students engage in a college preparatory curriculum, prepare for college entrance examinations, find scholarships and other financial aid, and select the best colleges to suit their unique needs and aspirations. According to the most recent data collected by the U.S. Department of Education, students who participated in Talent Search enrolled in postsecondary education immediately following graduation at a rate that far exceeded that of low-income high school seniors who did not take part in the program. Talent Search, however, is only able to reach a fraction of the eligible population of low-income, potential first-generation college-goers.

The EOC program provides similar services, but focuses primarily on adult learners, including low-wage or displaced workers. EOC works with clients to provide assistance in college entry and re-entry, thereby addressing the challenges faced by students who have dropped out of high school or college. Quite often, EOC clients pursue higher education as a means of enhancing their
families’ economic viability. Recent analysis of EOC performance data found that more than half of “college-ready” students enrolled in institutions of higher learning and 71 percent of eligible EOC participants (high school seniors, postsecondary dropouts, etc.) applied to college. Unfortunately, EOC is able to serve only a fraction of eligible low-wage or displaced workers and high school dropouts.

We appreciate the Committee’s continued and increased investment in TRIO. Given the programs’ proven success and the ever-present need to address issues of access, affordability, and completion in students’ higher education, we respectfully request your support of robust funding for TRIO in FY 2021 and urge you to reject any proposals to alter or eliminate these vital programs.

Sincerely,

/s/ Susan M. Collins        /s/ Jon Tester        /s/ Tammy Baldwin
Susan M. Collins           Jon Tester           Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator      United States Senator United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker          /s/ Kevin Cramer
Cory A. Booker             Kevin Cramer
United States Senator      United States Senator

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy   /s/ Doug Jones
Christopher S. Murphy      Doug Jones
United States Senator      United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown           /s/ Angus S. King, Jr.
Sherrod Brown              Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator      United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.    /s/ Tim Kaine
Robert P. Casey, Jr.        Tim Kaine
United States Senator      United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper        /s/ Maria Cantwell
Thomas R. Carper            Maria Cantwell
United States Senator      United States Senator
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/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema
Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris
Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith
Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden
Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/s/ John Cornyn
John Cornyn
United States Senator

/s/ Mike Crapo
Mike Crapo
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez
Robert Menendez
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator