February 28, 2011

United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

As the House of Representatives moves forward on a short-term Continuing Appropriations Act, we are pleased Congress is acting to prevent a federal government shutdown, since a shutdown would have resulted in a delay of essential aid to millions of students who need federal grants and loans to attend college. This temporary solution has come at a high price, however: the elimination of the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnerships (LEAP) Program, which encourages states to partner with the federal government to make grants to low-income college students.

At a time when the federal government is seeking to do more with less, eliminating the LEAP Program is particularly shortsighted. The LEAP Program’s federal allocation of $64 million generates more than $1 billion in financial aid for over 1 million American students. This represents an average award of $1,700, and can be the difference between earning a degree and dropping out of college for the over 80 percent of LEAP families earning less than $40,000 a year.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in January the unemployment rate for those with a bachelor’s degree or higher was 4.5 percent, compared to 12 percent for those with a high school diploma or less. Educated workers also earn substantially more: Employees with a bachelor’s degree out-earn employees with only a high school diploma by $20,748 annually.

If our economy is to recover and thrive again, we will need precisely the kind of skilled workers the LEAP Program has produced. We regret that in the understandable urgency to reach a compromise on short-term funding, the highly effective and efficient LEAP Program has been targeted. In combination with other cuts proposed to Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG) and other student aid programs, these reductions will have both immediate and long-term negative impacts on our country’s economic competitiveness.

Sincerely,

Molly Corbett Broad    David Warren
Co-Chairman      Co-Chairman
2011 Members

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