

April 10, 2020

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The Honorable Mitch McConnell
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Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

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

Dear Congressional Leadership:

I am writing on behalf of Rebuilding America's Middle Class, a coalition of community colleges to thank you for your leadership in the COVID emergency response packages to date, including the nearly \$14 billion for institutions of higher education authorized through the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act*. These resources will be crucial to helping our students achieve their educational goals. This letter also offers our recommendations for the 4th upcoming COVID package.

RAMC is a coalition of State and individual community college systems from across the country, representing over 120 colleges and 1.5 million students. Community colleges serve 45 percent of all first-time freshmen, 40 percent of our students are the first in their family to attend college, and a significant proportion of our nation's minority undergraduates who attend community colleges, including 42 percent of all African American undergraduates, nearly half of all Hispanic undergraduates, and 56 percent of Native American undergraduates. Community colleges have historically existed to make higher education accessible for everyone and match our employers' need for a large, diverse workforce. We know the importance of preparing more Americans to enter the workforce with the skills they need to compete for in-demand jobs.

Amid this current national emergency, our institutions, and many other community colleges across the nation, have worked tirelessly to ensure that our students have access to the education and supportive services they need to continue on with their programs. This has meant moving thousands of courses to new [on-line modalities](#) and helping the many students who are struggling through this crisis such as offering free [Wi-Fi](#) via [hotspots](#), creating a [pop-up food pantry](#) for students in need, and lending [office space](#) in order to provide mental health services during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Many of our colleges have also stepped up to help meet the broader needs of our communities during these unprecedented times. Many RAMC colleges, including Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, schools within the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) and other systems have not only loaned out [ventilators](#) to area hospitals to meet the critical needs for these lifesaving devices, but also [created](#) them with [3D printers](#). Similarly, [Milwaukee Area Technical College, Northcentral Technical College, Maysville Community and Technical College, and DCCCD](#) have been donating thousands of dollars' worth of personal protective equipment (PPE) to area hospitals in response to the growing COVID-19 pandemic. RAMC members have also helped small businesses apply for the Small Business Administration (SBA) loans to keep vital workforce partners afloat during these uncertain times.

While community colleges are supporting their communities, RAMC believes additional support is needed from the Federal government to aid our students during this crisis and ensure America has the educated and trained workforce to rebuild our economy. We recommend the following provisions be added to the next COVID-19 package advanced by Congress in the coming weeks:

- **Enact Short-term Pell.** Pell Grants are the most important tool for community colleges in ensuring post-secondary success for low-income students. Unfortunately, many of our students have only a high school diploma or its equivalency, work, care for children or other family members, or a combination of all three. The current Pell grant structure doesn't allow these time-strapped students to get aid to earn short-term credentials that lead to high paying, career starting jobs. We would urge Congress to include an expansion of Pell to cover programs leading to these types of short-term credentials.
- **Increase WIOA funding.** With the economic impact of COVID-19, businesses will lay-off workers or must outright close. Our country will need Federal job training resources to help many of these workers acquire new education and skills to achieve employment in growing fields in which they may not have worked before. We would urge Congress to provide \$8 billion in WIOA funding through the Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth and National Reserve programs to meet the job training needs of workers. With this funding, we would urge you to provide the highest allocation to Governors that is possible to allow community college systems to work directly with Governor's office to meet the needs of their states.
- **Additional funding for emergency grant aid and IHEs through the Education Stabilization Fund.** Building off the education stabilization fund included in the CARES Act last month, the fourth emergency COVID response should include additional investment for colleges and universities. Our students, who tend to be working and raising families at higher rates than other postsecondary students, have been hit the hardest by transition to online instruction. Some of our programs require physical in-person instruction and learning, likely leading students in those programs to delay completion until after the COVID-19 emergency passes. While we very much appreciate the funds that will shortly be flowing to our colleges, more is needed to meet the emergency needs of our students and ensure that online education offerings deliver the same value as bricks and mortar classes offered before the emergency. We urge Congress to provide \$46.6 billion for institutions of higher education through the 90 percent formula allocation of the Stabilization fund.
- **Reimburse colleges for equipment provided to healthcare facilities.** Much of the equipment, such as ventilators and personal protective equipment being loaned to area hospitals by our community colleges will need to be replenished once classes are back in session. These supplies are critical for our workforce programs to train the next generation

of healthcare workers. We would urge Congress to include community colleges in any program that provides aid to replace or restock equipment such as ventilators and PPE that is necessary to train our first responders, nurses and other health care professionals.

- **Invest in virtualization technology for healthcare programs.** The federal government should help community college purchase virtualization technology that can help meet the demand of healthcare workers due to the COVID emergency. This equipment will help address the immediate needs of healthcare students who are close to completing their training and education, but whose required clinical placements have been delayed due to the closure of clinical sites at hospital and other healthcare facilities. Even after the current health emergency has passed, this equipment will continue to speed up the entry into the workforce of much needed healthcare professionals in fields that even in the best of times experience training bottlenecks due to the lack of available student clinicals as required for completion of their programs.
- **Low interest loans for capital projects.** As workers seek training at community colleges due to the worsening economy, our institutions may be required to invest in new equipment and buildings to educate and train increasing numbers of students. To ensure all colleges can respond to this need, we would urge Congress to provide for community colleges to get low interest loans for capital projects that include the purpose of equipment, construction, or the acquisition of buildings and property to meet the need to upgrade or increase their student training facilities.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. We look forward to working with you to ensure the needs of our students and families are met during these unprecedented times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joe D. May".

Joe May
Board Chair, Rebuilding America's Middle Class (RAMC)
Chancellor, Dallas County Community College District