



July 14, 2020

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

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 on 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. As discussions on the next package begin, I am writing to reiterate our recommendations to enable community colleges to meet the needs of their students this fall and beyond.

RAMC represents more than 120 community colleges and 1.5 million students nationwide. As you know, community colleges serve 45 percent of all first-time freshmen and 40 percent of our students are first generation college students. Additionally, a significant proportion of our nation's minority undergraduates 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 to match employers' need for a larger, more 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 are working tirelessly to help ensure students have access to the education and support services they need to continue with their programs. This has meant moving thousands of courses to new [online modalities](#) and instituting new programs and initiatives to aid the many students who are struggling through the COVID-19 crisis, such as offering free [Wi-Fi hotspots](#), creating [pop-up food pantries](#) for food-insecure students, and lending [office spaces](#) to provide mental health services.

Additionally, many colleges are taking action to help meet the broader needs of our communities during these unprecedented times. RAMC colleges, including Northeast

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Wisconsin Technical College and schools within the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) and the Kentucky Community & Technical College System, have not only loaned [ventilators](#) to area hospitals to meet the critical needs for these lifesaving devices, but have also begun [creating](#) them using [3D printing technology](#). Similarly, [Milwaukee Area Technical College](#), [Northcentral Technical College](#), [Maysville Community and Technical College](#), and [DCCCD](#) have donated thousands of dollars 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 through the crisis.

While our colleges are working diligently and creatively to find new outlets to support students and their communities, additional aid from the Federal government is vital to our continued ability to help students during this crisis and ensure community colleges across America have the ability to continue to respond to our nation's education and workforce needs. We recommend the following provisions be included in the next COVID-19 package advanced by Congress:

- **Enact Short-term Pell.** Pell Grants are the most important tool for community colleges in ensuring postsecondary success for low-income students. Unfortunately, many of our students have only a high school diploma or equivalency and are balancing work and caring for children or other family members. 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, and we urge Congress to include an expansion of Pell to cover these invaluable programs that can make a huge difference in students' future earnings potential.
- **Provide additional funding for emergency grant aid and IHEs through the Education Stabilization Fund.** Building off the education stabilization fund included in the *CARES Act*, the next COVID response package must 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 in-person classes. We urge Congress to provide \$132 billion for institutions of higher education through the Education Stabilization Fund created by the *CARES Act*. We should note that we strongly support the formula change to this authority included in the House-passed *HEROES Act* that would ensure funds are more equitably allocated to community colleges. In addition, we support a strong maintenance of effort that makes sure State dollars provided to institutions remain in exchange for additional Federal funding.
- **Ensure broadband for low-income college students.** While community colleges have worked hard to help students access remote learning opportunities, too many low-income students lack adequate broadband access to complete their virtual studies. While there has been an emphasis on the needs of connectivity within the K-12 systems, there has been a dearth of conversation at the Federal level about the broadband needs of higher education students. We urge Congress to reverse this trend and recognize that internet access needs to

be dramatically expanded to eliminate the digital divide that limits low-income community college students' ability to access the courses and persist in their studies in the remote learning environment that will likely continue into the fall. For this reason, RAMC endorses the *Supporting Connectivity for Higher Education Students in Need Act* (S. 3701) that was introduced by Senator Klobuchar earlier this year. This bill provides \$1 billion to colleges and universities to facilitate broadband access for low-income students, and we urge the inclusion of this legislation in the next COVID package.

- **Provide additional funding to improve air quality for community college facilities.** As some education and training requires in-person instruction and we look to maximize the physical opening of our facilities safely, community colleges will need additional funding to meet the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) facility air handling recommendations. ASHRAE recommends upgrading air-filters, increasing airflow versus recirculating inside air, and installing ionization elements. These steps are vital to help purify indoor air quality, but the cost of doing so for the average college building is approximately \$10,000. When you consider the number of buildings on community college campuses, these costs could quickly escalate to over \$100,000 per campus and millions across State community college systems. It will be extremely difficult to support the health of our students and staff participating in in-person instruction if these steps are not taken.
- **Increase WIOA funding.** Due to the economic impact of COVID-19, some businesses will be forced to lay off workers or close outright. Our country will need Federal job training resources to help many of these workers acquire new education and skills to compete for jobs in industries in which they may not have worked before. We would urge Congress to provide a significant amount of additional 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 possible to governors to allow community college systems to work directly with governors' offices to meet the needs of their individual States. In addition, we would urge you to maximize the use of these funds to provide training, including for short-term credentials that lead to high-paying, career-starting jobs.
- **Reimburse colleges for equipment provided to healthcare facilities.** Much of the equipment, such as ventilators and personal protective equipment, that has been 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 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 this type of equipment 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 colleges 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 expedite 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. We urge Congress to provide funding for this technology.

- **Provide 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 allow community colleges to obtain 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 student training facilities.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joe D. May". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "J" and "M".

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