



## MEMORANDUM

TO: **Biden Administration**

FROM: **Rebuilding America's Middle Class (RAMC)**

DATE: **December 10, 2020**

SUBJECT: **RAMC Recommendations**

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This memorandum lays out the recommendations of Rebuilding America's Middle Class: A Coalition of Community Colleges (RAMC) for work with Congress in the beginning of 2021.

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, especially as our nation continues to counteract the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *RAMC recommendations*

With the pandemic 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. Unfortunately, too many of our students have had to put their education on hold due to the impact of the pandemic and the condition of the economy. Many of our systems have surveyed students and found that life situations, rather than the ability to afford tuition at our low-cost institutions, have interfered with their ability to continue their education. Reasons include a lack of childcare, caring for sick family members and the inability to have adequate access to the internet and Wi-Fi capable devices.

With this focus, we urge the incoming Administration to work with Congress on these key areas:

**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. Many 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 have been provided, 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 the incoming Administration to work with Congress to provide \$120 billion for institutions of higher education through the Education Stabilization Fund created by the CARES Act. While funding both K12 and higher education are both important, community colleges are in dire need of the highest possible funding allocation Congress can provide. 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 and Wi-Fi devices 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 the incoming Administration to work with 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 any COVID package moved in the early days of the 117<sup>th</sup> 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 does not allow these time-strapped students to get aid to earn short-term credentials that lead to high-paying, career-starting jobs, and we urge the incoming Administration to work with Congress to include an expansion of Pell to cover these invaluable programs that can make a huge difference in students' future earnings potential. With the need to retool and retrain quickly as this pandemic continues to impact our country, this new short term option needs be passed now so it can be implemented as our economy and education systems begin to fully reopen.

**Increase childcare funding and support providers.** A major barrier to our students having the time and ability to attend class (whether virtually or in person) is access to childcare. The pandemic has forced providers to close or curtail operations, reducing the number of quality childcare slots available to parents. We urge the incoming Administration to work with Congress to significantly increase child care funding and ensure funds can be used to support the reopening and continued operation of providers.