

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

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

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

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell, and Leader Schumer:

Almost one in four students on today's college campuses is not only a student, but also a parent. Like many other students, parents who are postsecondary students themselves are currently dealing with the closing of colleges and universities,¹ rapid relocation from on-campus housing,² transitions to remote instruction,³ and job losses.⁴ However, student parents are also grappling with child care and school closures,⁵ among other crises, as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As the effects of the pandemic reverberate throughout the country, student parents' vulnerabilities are rising to new heights, threatening their ability to keep their families healthy and secure on top of continuing their studies. As you continue to address the urgent needs of this country, we urge Congress to consider our recommendations to these challenges in the next COVID-19 relief package.

Parenting students attend postsecondary education online and in the classroom,⁶ study throughout the calendar year, and weave together a patchwork of educational skills and credentials.⁷ Student parents may rely on their college's on-campus child care center or other community partners.⁸ Some of them are among the eighty-one percent of part-time students holding down a job while studying,⁹ producing vital income for their families. In the face of this emergency, these realities become even more pressing.

Ariel Ventura-Lazo—father to a 9-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter, and a student at George Mason University—succinctly describes “the hard but honest truth: I just don't have enough time to be a good

¹<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/its-not-just-double-duty-its-triple-duty-student-parents-prepare-to-juggle-college-work-and-childcare-this-fall-11596548732>

²<https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/coronavirus-closed-colleges-sent-students-home-some-them-have-no-where-ncna1170866>

³<https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/student-parent-success-initiative/student-parents-in-the-covid-19-pandemic-heightened-need-the-imperative-for-strengthened-support-2/>

⁴ <https://www.imaginablefutures.com/learnings/coronavirus-scare-has-exposed-cracks-our-systems/>

⁵ https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2019_ParentingStudentsReport.pdf

⁶ https://higherlearningadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Todays-Student-1-pager_final.pdf

⁷<https://higherlearningadvocates.org/resource/publications/backgrounder-evolving-models-of-postsecondary-learning/>

⁸https://static1.squarespace.com/static/50363015e4b09af678ee8675/t/5ebb5651e738976451bca202/1589335635795/GH+%23StudentParentSuccess+Report+Findings+Overview+1pg_Final.pdf

⁹ https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_ssa.pdf

parent, employee and student. Something has to give. For me, for now, it will be my education.”¹⁰ His story highlights what so many student parents face in the wake of the pandemic:

“Student-parents are among those most affected by these challenges, because we feel the impacts on so many levels. While I am lucky that my work allows me to telecommute, and for now my family is healthy, millions of student parents are now balancing increased child care needs with transitioning their educations online, while also facing uncertainty with work.”

Supporting students both inside and outside the classroom results in success—student parents perform better academically than their peers without dependents when they have access to the right supports.¹¹ Further, a degree or credential leads to increased earnings over one's lifetime, and for student parents these increased wages have a double impact (on themselves and on their children),¹² along with contributing to growth in the economy.

Even before the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent campus closures, many students struggled to cover costs for food, housing, transportation, and child care. However, the pandemic is highlighting just how critical access to locally accessible food, child care, or reliably stable internet connectivity can be. As we've seen, the recovery from this pandemic will not be immediate and there is a long road back to economic recovery and a sense of normalcy. During this time, it is crucial that Congress keep the realities of today's student parents' experiences in mind. We urge Congress to include the following recommendations in the next COVID-19 package:

- Increase funding and flexibility of funds for CCAMPIS. The Child Care Access Means Parents In School (CCAMPIS) program provides vital support for the participation and success of low-income parents in postsecondary education through the provision of campus-based child care, which is widely recognized as one of the most important supports for parenting college students. Current funding levels support only about 7,600 student parents on campuses.¹³ First, CCAMPIS needs to be funded at a robust level to meet a greater share of the child care needs of parenting students. Second, flexibility should continue to be provided under the CCAMPIS program to address the closure or limited operation of on-campus child care facilities due to COVID-19: CCAMPIS funds should be allowed to support student parents selecting child care options in the area surrounding or near to a campus so long as such child care is high-quality and accredited, child care providers are under contracts with the student's institution to provide such care, and providers meet state licensing requirements.
- Address the widespread food insecurity student parents face. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program offers nutrition assistance to eligible low-income individuals and families; however, many students are ineligible for these benefits. Eighteen percent of students are eligible for SNAP, yet only 3 percent of students actually receive benefits.¹⁴ Food insecurity should not be an additional barrier to completing a degree or credential, especially for student parents seeking a more secure economic future for themselves and their children.

¹⁰<https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/student-voice-a-working-parent-in-college-takes-on-remote-learning-for-himself-and-his-kids-says-something-has-to-give/>

¹¹ <https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/student-parent-success-initiative/parents-in-college-by-the-numbers/>

¹² <https://medium.com/positive-returns/a-two-generation-approach-to-early-childhood-7ea8abaacc21>

¹³ <https://younginvincibles.org/congress-coronavirus-response-must-support-student-parents/>

¹⁴ <https://higherlearningadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Final-Todays-Students-Policy-Toolkit.pdf>

Congress should expand and streamline SNAP benefits for students enrolled in postsecondary institutions to reduce food insecurity and should create a more seamless connection between the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and SNAP.

- Expand Broadband Connectivity for student parents and their households. Now that many institutions have shifted to a fully online or blended model of instruction, student parents and their children rely even more acutely on connection to the internet to continue their learning. A 2019 study conducted by Microsoft found that over 160 million Americans don't have broadband internet, and this lack of access to high-speed internet disproportionately impacts rural areas, low-income communities, and tribal nations.¹⁵ Even when families have access to the internet through a mobile device, data plans that are capped per month and spotty Wi-Fi connections can make data-intensive online learning—such as watching videos or attending online lectures—challenging for students. Although not having a laptop or living in a broadband desert are challenges, the most common reason given for not having high-speed access is the cost of services.¹⁶ Congress should provide funds to institutions of higher education to provide hotspots, Wi-Fi connected devices, and vouchers for affordable and reliable broadband services to postsecondary students, including parenting students, to ensure their ability to continue earning their degree or credential.

Student parents have always needed a system that is flexible, affordable and responsive to their needs. In the face of this pandemic, we urge Congress to move swiftly in a bipartisan manner to address our recommendations. Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,

Higher Learning Advocates
Achieving the Dream
Advance Vermont
America Forward
Ascend at the Aspen Institute
Association of Big Ten Students
Center for First-generation Student Success
Children's Home & Aid
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Cornell Student Assembly
Early Education Action League
Feminist Majority Foundation
First Focus Campaign for Children
Frederick Community College
Generation Hope
Groundwork Ohio
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)
Institute for Women's Policy Research
JFF
Kentucky Youth Advocates

¹⁵ <https://higherlearningadvocates.org/news/partner-organizations-urge-congress-increase-broadband-access/>

¹⁶ <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2019/demo/sehsd-wp2019-15.pdf>

Kids Campus @ SFCC
Los Angeles Valley College Family Resource Center
Low Income Investment Fund
Michigan's Children
Monroe Community College (SUNY)
Mount Wachusett Community College
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Organization for Women
Office of Student Government Relations, Cornell Student Assembly
One Family
Our Children Oregon
Save the Children Action Network
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Early Childhood Center
St. Louis Community College
Student Veterans of America
The Graduate! Network
The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice
The Ounce of Prevention Fund
uAspire
UPCEA
Veterans Education Success
Women Employed
World Education, Inc.
Young Invincibles