



March 23, 2020

Dear Louisiana Congressional Delegation,

We write today to share collective concerns over the immediate and long-term threats posed by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) to Louisiana's higher education community and the more than 200,000 students we serve. Your leadership and swift action in recent days are much appreciated. Louisiana's higher education institutions stand ready to assist in this crisis response however possible while continuing to drive the state's talent imperative through education delivery despite growing financial uncertainty and dwindling resources.

In concert with state and federal directives, all public and private institutions have transitioned to online instruction and have suspended in-person classes. While residence halls on some campuses remain open to support students who are unable to move home or who must stay because internet needed to continue courses is not available at home, the census numbers are decreasing daily. This transition to off-site and off-campus operations presents a myriad of challenges as we continue work to fulfill our academic, economic, research, cultural and public service missions. In response to this crisis, higher education will help pave the way to Louisiana's prosperity as a catalyst for the economy.

We ask you, as our Congressional delegation, to continue to work with our institutions as you identify ways to address both the immediate burdens and the long-term impacts to our students, campuses and communities. Our institutions are committed to and already taking a leadership role in innovating and collaborating with research and workforce training to contribute to the recovery efforts that lie ahead.

The financial impacts of COVID-19 on our colleges and universities include lost revenue – refunds/credits of room, board and other fees due to closure or moving instruction online – as well as potential foregone revenue due to reduced enrollments in coming months, semesters and possibly years. Additionally, the rapid and urgent response to COVID-19 has demanded significant unanticipated expenditures.

### **Emergency Aid to Students and Institutions**

While every student has experienced challenges during this uncertain period, there are student populations more susceptible to hardships during the shift to online instruction and/or campus closures. We are concerned that these students, who may be low-income, homeless, or foster youth, will struggle to meet their basic needs, which include

housing, transportation, food, and medical care, without direct on-campus support. Those challenges have further highlighted the digital divide facing students in our rural communities and low-income students who are struggling to access the technology necessary to make the online shift. Access to the internet must be extended to all places our students will now call home while they continue their studies. It is critical the federal government help institutions ensure our most vulnerable students are not harmed as an unintended consequence of efforts to protect them from COVID-19.

A federal program providing grant support to reimburse institutions with demonstrable operating losses during this time would help colleges and universities serve students and communities. Utilizing the already-existing Pell Grant disbursement system is a possible means for the federal government to furnish direct support to students and institutions. This could include a one-time expansion of Pell grant eligibility beyond our poorest to middle-income students, who also will be facing enrollment difficulty this coming fall. This mechanism has the advantage of allowing for greatly needed rapid disbursement of funding at scale and can be tied to student-centric expenditures. Federal regulatory flexibility and considerations for such programs as SAP and SEOG are also requested.

### **Technology Funding**

While many of our institutions utilized robust online learning tools prior to this pandemic, none attempted to implement an exclusively distance education model. Some institutions such as community colleges, minority-serving institutions, and institutions with a high percentage of Pell recipients had only limited online configuration and will require additional technology acquisitions to achieve full online instruction. We have an opportunity at this juncture – an opportunity to not only make immediate changes to get through the short term, but to plan strategically for delivery platforms that can elevate learning into the future as well. There is expense to building capacity to rapidly transition to the needs of the present moment; but costs involved with constructing a platform for distance learning can be structured to benefit both current students and those for years to come. We request the federal government provide grant funding to ensure higher education institutions can invest in these essential changes.

### **Supplemental Research Funding**

Salaries for graduate students, post-doctoral researchers and other laboratory technicians are often fully funded by federal grants. Personnel can be paid a salary from such grants only if they are performing duties related to these grants. We request Congress provide supplemental appropriations to research agencies, so they can provide emergency paid leave for grant personnel, as well as ramp-up costs for COVID-19-related research.

### **Access to Low-Cost Capital**

The financial consequences of this pandemic for institutions of higher education – both public and private – are historic; and the need to assure the higher education sector's continuity of operations is only eclipsed by the need to intensify educational attainment to contribute to national recovery efforts. Access to affordable capital is fundamental for survival of institutions and the communities they serve.

Debt service payments are a significant expense for all institutions. While all institutions continue to prioritize debt service, lost auxiliary revenue will strain their ability to cover this cost without putting other campus needs at risk. We request the federal government provide our institutions with access to zero-interest refinancing and zero-interest loans, along with additional tax measures, to enable us to redirect resources currently used for debt service to support other aspects of our daily operations.

**Nursing Program Support to Address National Needs**

Higher education has heeded the call of the health care industry, continually striving to educate and train students to alleviate the national nursing shortage. The COVID-19 health care surge demands immediate action, while the national nursing shortage will extend long beyond. Now is the time for strategic investment in nursing programs to expand the capacity of these programs to train many more students. There are currently over 600 nursing students enrolled in clinical settings and set to graduate from a Louisiana university in May. Some of those students are facing the suspension of clinical instruction out of concern for student safety and the lack of sufficient personal protective equipment for healthcare providers. Institutions continue to look for ways to ensure that all students pursuing a postsecondary nursing credential can finish their programs as intended this semester and have an opportunity to immediately enter the workforce. Governor John Bel Edward’s recent executive order allows flexibility for faculty to substitute online and lab simulations for in-person and clinical classroom instruction. We appreciate your support to ensure actions such as this, coupled with deliberate investment in nursing programs, can be leveraged to benefit students, provide health care to citizens during this dire time of need and, over the longer term, help address the national nursing shortage.

We are extremely appreciative of the Louisiana Congressional Delegation’s national leadership, as well as your support for our students and institutions during this unprecedented public health crisis. Please do not hesitate to let us know if we can provide additional information or resources.

Sincerely,



Dr. Kim Hunter Reed, Louisiana Commissioner of Higher Education



Dr. Monty Sullivan, President, Louisiana Community and Technical College System



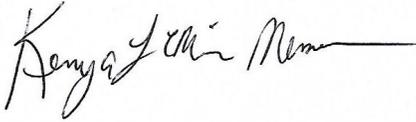
Thomas C. Galligan, Jr., Interim President, Louisiana State University System



Dr. Ray Belton, President, Southern University System



Dr. Jim Henderson, President, University of Louisiana System



Dr. Kenya Messer, President, Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

Signing on behalf of:

Baton Rouge Community College | Bossier Parish Community College | Central Louisiana Technical Community College  
Delgado Community College | L.E. Fletcher Technical Community College | Louisiana Delta Community College  
Northshore Technical Community College | Nunez Community College | Northwest LA Technical Community College  
River Parishes Community College | South Louisiana Community College | SOWELA Technical Community College

Louisiana State University | Louisiana State University at Eunice | Louisiana State University of Alexandria  
Louisiana State University Shreveport | LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans  
LSU Health Sciences Center Shreveport | Paul M. Hebert Law Center

Southern University | Southern University at New Orleans | Southern University at Shreveport  
Southern University Law Center

Grambling State University | Louisiana Tech University | McNeese State University | Nicholls State University  
Northwestern State University | Southeastern Louisiana University | University of Louisiana at Lafayette  
University of Louisiana at Monroe | The University of New Orleans

Centenary College of Louisiana | Dillard University | Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University  
Louisiana College | Loyola University New Orleans | New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary  
Saint Joseph Seminary College | Tulane University | University of Holy Cross | Xavier University of Louisiana