

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS
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COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY:
SUPPORTING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND
LESSONS ON SAFELY RETURNING TO CAMPUS

WRITTEN TESTIMONY
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Thank you, Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr and Members of the Committee for inviting me to appear before you today as you review how colleges and universities have supported students using federal relief funds during COVID-19.

My name is Youlonda Copeland-Morgan and I am the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). In this capacity, I oversee the offices of Undergraduate Admission, Financial Aid and Scholarships, Strategic Partnerships and Community Engagement, as well as the nearly one-billion dollar financial aid and scholarship budget for UCLA's undergraduate, graduate and professional schools. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and provide testimony on the significant impact of the Congressionally provided Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds, known as HEERF.

These funds enabled students to continue their education and pursue their dreams of a college degree just when that dream seemed shattered by COVID-19. HEERF funds will also prove to be a powerful investment in the recovery and growth of our economy. Research has proven that higher education leads to increased earnings, lower unemployment and higher tax revenues.

My testimony will also address why the end of COVID-19 does not mean that the need for increased Federal financial aid will end. There will not be a return to normal for students in public universities and community colleges. The needs of students may change, but they will not diminish. In fact, the opposite is true.

Recently, a November 2020 report from the University of California Regents' *Special Committee on Basic Needs* acknowledged that "basic needs insecurity...has pervaded universities nationwide for decades."

Over the past several years, colleges and universities have increased their efforts to meet these needs. For example, the University of California system (UC) has not increased tuition for the last eight years. Also, the UC system and the state of California have awarded substantial financial aid in the form of institutional and state aid to qualifying students. In 2019-2020, the state of California awarded \$950 million in state grants, and the UC system awarded \$800 million in need-

based grants to undergraduate students, compared to \$400 million in Federal Pell Grants. The Regents' *Special Committee* also estimated that the UC system's efforts to help meet students' basic needs supported an estimated minimum number of 40,000 students in the 2019-2020 academic year.

Despite these efforts, and families' willingness to contribute to their students' college education, funding from the State of California and the UC system, along with generous philanthropy, is not sufficient to meet students' basic needs for food, adequate housing, healthcare, affordable transportation and other emergency needs. Federal financial aid will continue to be critical to help colleges and universities provide a college education to the students who are the future engine of the country's economic growth.

In March of 2020, when Covid-19 cases began to rise substantially in Los Angeles, UCLA closed. Students, especially from low-income, rural and other underserved communities, had difficulty studying remotely without computers, internet service or other basic technology. Students from low- and middle-income families tried to find work to help their families pay their bills and put food on the table. Anyone who watched television and saw long lines of cars with people waiting to get boxes of food for their family knows how widespread food insecurity was at the beginning of the pandemic.

The Federal government helped by allowing the University flexibility in our work-study programs that are required for some students to receive additional financial aid. We were encouraged to create different types of jobs that students could do remotely. We were also allowed to give students their work-study payments if they tried, but were unable, to find work. It's important to know that our students preferred to work, but the pandemic made it extremely difficult for them to find jobs they could do from home.

I want to thank you for this flexibility. It made a big difference for many students and helped the University with retention so students could complete their education.

However, even with this support, many students had to drop out of college. According to a Los Angeles Times article, dated June 10, 2021, California had the largest drop in college enrollment numbers in the nation from Spring 2020 to Spring 2021. The state's overall community college and university enrollment dropped by about 123,000 students or 5.3%.

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-06-10/california-has-the-largest-drop-in-spring-college-enrollment-numbers-in-the-nation>.

These conditions would have gotten even worse if Congress had not taken action to help higher education institutions meet their students' basic and pandemic-driven emergency needs. The HEERF funds authorized by Congress were indeed a lifeline.

At UCLA, from April 2020 through March 2021, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) HEERF I grants of nearly \$18 million were awarded to 22,695 students.

These grants covered specific pandemic-related expenses and provided need-based grants to undergraduate, graduate and professional students, with a particular focus on Pell Grant and middle-income families, and those facing higher than expected housing and technology costs.

Upon notification of HEERF II funds, UCLA immediately began to determine eligibility for these grants. In early June, 2021, UCLA awarded HEERF II student grants of \$17.3 million to over 13,000 students to date. An additional \$600,000 will be awarded to address ongoing student financial aid appeals throughout summer enrollments.

The process is already underway for awarding the American Rescue Plan (ARP) HEERF III funds exceeding \$46 million dollars for the Fall 2021-2022 academic year. These funds will be used to address parental unemployment, changes in student income and other pandemic related costs.

Without HEERF funds, the post-pandemic future would have been extremely challenging for higher education institutions, students, families, communities and our country. HEERF funds were...and continue to be ...extremely important. They enable students to continue their education, graduate on time and work toward their dreams of a college degree.

HEERF funds have an even more lasting impact. They are an investment in the country's economic recovery and growth. In May 2020, the Bureau of Labor Statistics published a report that said it well. The headline was "Learn more, earn more: Education leads to higher wages, lower unemployment." The report went on to say that "As workers' educational attainment rises, their unemployment rates decrease and earnings increase."

Other research has demonstrated that as earnings increase, tax revenues to governments also increase. In 2015 the Association of Public & Land Grant Universities, including UCLA, published a fact sheet entitled *How Do College Graduates Benefit Society At Large?* <https://www.aplu.org/projects-and-initiatives/college-costs-tuition-and-financial-aid/publicvalues/publicvalues-resources/q4/GradsSociety.pdf>

This publication affirmed that college graduates provide governments with a disproportionate share of tax revenues. Moreover, it stated that "Over a lifetime, bachelor's degree holders contribute \$381,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits." This contribution is likely to have grown even bigger over the last six years since the report was published.

Now, at UCLA, we are eagerly looking to the future.

When UCLA opens in September, two new entering classes will arrive on campus at the same time, the class of Fall 2020 and the new class of Fall 2021. They will become part of UCLA's 43,000 undergraduate, graduate and professional students.

With your ongoing support, along with support from the state of California and the UC system, UCLA's graduation rate will continue to be higher than the average graduation rate of similarly situated colleges and universities across the nation. We are extremely proud of our most recent graduating class that entered UCLA in 2016 and graduated at the end of the 2019-20 academic year. They upheld our extraordinary record, especially for a public institution, by achieving a 4-year graduation rate of 84.2%.

After this terrible year, the future finally looks bright again for students who dream of graduating from college and creating productive lives for themselves, their families and their communities.

They need...and deserve...all the help we can give them to become the future our country needs.
Thank you and now I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.