

Good morning,

Chair Murry, Ranking Member Burr and members of this committee, it is an honor to be testifying before you all today. My name is Anthony Harris JR, and I am a graduating senior at Baldwin Wallace University with a BFA in Acting and a proud mentee of College Now Greater Cleveland, an organization who without I would not be sitting before you as a college student today.

To begin, I would like to thank you all for the opportunity to speak on behalf of higher education students from all over the country who benefit from federal funding and who also have been impacted in many ways by this devastating pandemic. I also like to think that I speak on behalf of students who could benefit from federal funding and support but, for whatever reason, don't have access to the necessary means in order to reap in the benefits.

Like many students across the country, I have had an unorthodox college experience to say the least. It began with being accepted into High Tech Academy, an Ohio College Credit Plus program that offers High School students the opportunity to take college level courses at Cuyahoga Community College in order to get a head start in their collegiate endeavors. It was through High Tech that I gained not only college credit, but the imperative knowledge about higher education that I would use during the rest of my college career. I was also motivated by peers and introduced to leadership programs like the Rotsky Foundation, Key Club, and Circle K that encouraged students and prepared them for college readiness.

With all of that in mind though, the harsh reality is individuals can't go to college if they can afford it. That's where College Now came into play for me. This unique organization provides students with personalized scholarship opportunities and a wealth of additional support services designed to aid students in their transition to higher education. Through College Now, I was offered assistance in filling out The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) - an application form that I had never heard of before. After learning about this form and being given access to the support I needed, I discovered that I was eligible to receive Pell Grant funding that offers students just like me thousands of dollars towards their education. This Federal funding was life changing. The once aspirations of attending college become more attainable for those students who are at a financial disadvantage. This funding in particular was also needed when I was forced to transfer universities. It offered a peace of mind to both me and my family to know that I had federal financial support that would follow me to whatever university I attended. It was, in part, because of this funding that I was able to transfer to Baldwin Wallace with such ease and financial comfort.

These programs and fundings became more imperative than ever when news of the COVID-19 Pandemic became public during spring break. Baldwin Wallace students that had left campus for the break were asked to stay home and the trajectory of the semester changed dramatically. Professors and instructors were given a week to redesign their syllabi to meet the needs of distance learning.

Where this change was hard for faculty, it was also very difficult for students. I had no access to a personal computer or laptop. It was College Now that pulled resources together and provided students like myself with the computers they needed to transition to this new distanced learning. As a Resident Assistant (RA), I was tasked to keep in contact with all of my residents from home and it was then I realized the impact the pandemic had on all of them. From our correspondence, I found that many students struggled with a wide variety of problems. Some students did not own laptops, others had no access to the internet, and some didn't feel they had a safe place to get work done or even call home. I also interacted with some students who lived out of the state (or country) who were stuck on campus and couldn't get home to their families.

Things seemed very bleak until students got word of the CARES act funding that was being offered to them. This funding was well received and was used for a wide variety of things. Personally, I used the funding books and internet. Other campus wide uses included transportation, food, tuition and savings. Even as the next disbursements of the CARES Act funding was released, students were continuing to find creative ways to continue attending school at all cost.

When students returned to campus in the Fall though, things were still not back to normal. Baldwin Wallace had adopted a newer and more complex blended learning platform. Now, students were attending classes both online and in person based on classroom size and the professor's discretion. I applaud the way BW handled this new way of education. All students were asked to get tested before returning to campus and all on campus students were given a set of masks to use during the semester. Furthermore, the university also conducted randomized student testing where students were chosen at random during the semester to be tested for COVID-19. In addition to this, the University did not release students for Spring Break. Instead, we were all given selected days off in order to reduce students' interaction with members of the community at large who may have been exposed to the virus. All of these measures turned out to work and we were all able to remain on campus for the entire academic year without a surplus number of positive cases on campus.

The thing I find most important now, is that the access to federal funding continues to go out to organizations such as College Now, students and universities alike as the world continues to evolve. I believe the world of higher education would benefit from a doubling of Pell Grant Funds and the continued support from COVID relief funds.

I thank you all for time and attention and also for allowing me to speak before you all today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have. My name is Anthony Harris JR and this has been an honor. Thank you.