March 30, 2017

Emily Slack  
House Committee on Education and the Workforce  
2257 Rayburn Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Jenny Prescott  
House Committee on Education and the Workforce  
2257 Rayburn Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Jenny and Emily,

On behalf of the Consortium members listed below, I am writing to express our strong support for continued and maximum funding of federal student financial aid programs, including Pell Grants, Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants (SEOG), and Federal Work Study (FWS). Additionally, we strongly support reinstating year-round Pell Grants, TRIO, GEAR UP, and programs supporting graduate and professional education. Tens of thousands of students at Consortium institutions collectively receive hundreds of millions of dollars through these need-based aid programs that make access to and completing a postsecondary credential possible. Within the Consortium are institutions with some of the highest Pell Grant participation rates and completion rates in the country; for example, Trinity Washington University is proud that well over 80% of their students are Pell Grant recipients who otherwise would have no ability to attend college, and Georgetown University is proud of its 96% completion rates for Pell Grant recipients. The FWS program provides students a way to pay for their education and obtain work experience. For instance, the Consortium office has long hosted a FWS student from The George Washington University. This year, our student is gaining critical experience working with our government relations staff on local government issues to supplement his academic work.

An important aspect of the FWS and SEOG Programs is the institutional cost-share requirement at institutions not designated as exempt, also referred to as “skin-in-the-game.” The institutional contribution to FWS varies depending on the nature of the placement, and is 25% for SEOG. (Exempt institutions are HSIs, HBCUs, tribal colleges, and institutions serving Alaska or Hawaiian Natives). Such cost-sharing...
provides incentives for institutions to select the recipients of FWS or SEOG need-based aid deliberately and to institute appropriate levels of accountability.

The Consortium also strongly supports the continuation of Career and Technical Education (CTE) support. Most of these critical programs are housed at our community college member institutions (Montgomery College, Prince George’s College, and Northern Virginia Community College) as well as the University of the District of Columbia. The proposed disinvestment in workforce education and job training is inconsistent with President Trump’s major emphasis on job creation and infrastructure investment, particularly in view of the number of vacant positions that currently exist in key employment sectors.

The Consortium can add additional perspectives on the importance of federal support of postsecondary education. Two key aspects of the Consortium are the opportunities for students to take courses at other member institutions through the Consortium Cross-Registration Program, and the existence of an extensive array of transfer articulation agreements among member institutions. These two opportunities mean that the federal financial aid received by Consortium students has increased purchasing power and enhances the breadth of access and the rates of completion. We note that we have previously provided completion data for Consortium Pell Grant recipients that show the success of our member institutions in enabling students to complete their credentials.

We agree with the need for and support efforts aimed at simplifying financial aid programs. However, simplification of financial aid processes does not equate to drastic cuts or program elimination that reduces the net amount of aid available to students. For instance, the proposed elimination of the SEOG program would also eliminate much needed need-based aid that is distributed to students with unmet need beyond that supported by Pell Grants. To us, simplification means making the process of applying for federal financial aid easier, or removing unnecessary regulation and reporting requirements. It does not mean eliminating financial aid for the most financially challenged students.

We urge you to be especially mindful of changes to federal student and parent PLUS loans that differentially disadvantage students from the most financially challenged backgrounds. Such changes often make the difference in being able to obtain the desired credential. As we know from recent experience, changes in these programs differentially impact institutions with larger numbers of historically
underrepresented students (e.g., HBCUs, HSIs, tribal colleges, and institutions serving Alaska or Hawaiian Natives).

Finally, Consortium institutions work to continually improve students’ options for obtaining both meaningful work experience and various credentials and degrees. For example, students at Marymount University are required to complete an internship or equivalent experience (e.g., co-op placement). The University of Maryland, College Park participates in reverse transfer agreements with Maryland public community colleges. Similarly, Northern Virginia Community College is working with George Mason University on a reverse transfer program that would enable students who transfer out of NVCC early to use credits earned at GMU to obtain the associate degree credential from NVCC.

In sum, it is easy to view the expenditures in the various federal student financial aid programs as cost centers. They are not. They are investments in America’s future that ensure the continued existence of both the educated workforce and the educated citizens we need for our future prosperity and security. **The Consortium stands ready to collaborate to ensure that no one is denied access to the education they need because they cannot afford it.**

Thank you for your work to ensure that students will have the financial support they need. I would be happy to address any questions you may have, and look forward to our future conversations.

With all best regards,

John C. Cavanaugh, Ph.D.
President & CEO