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July 7, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510


Dear Senator Alexander,

I write on behalf of the University of Wisconsin System and our thirteen chancellors, faculty, staff and students in appreciation for the federal support that has helped us respond so quickly and well to the COVID-19 crisis. We are also grateful for the dedicated team of faculty and staff across the UW System who are shouldering enormous challenges while making sure our work goes on.

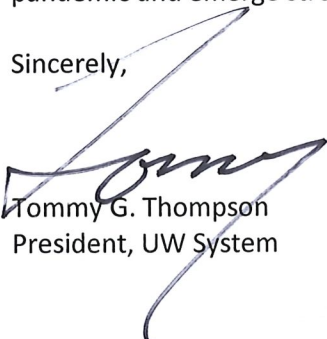
The University of Wisconsin System expects to welcome students back to campuses this fall. Our students are eager for the on-campus experience, our communities want campuses humming with energy again, the state needs a healthy UW System, and the country needs schools to reopen to help communities recover and regain a sense of normalcy.

We are making progress. Planning is underway at each UW institution to promote the health and safety of our students, faculty, staff, and communities. Students and employees will be asked to share responsibility and take appropriate measures to reduce the risks to themselves and others posed by COVID-19. To support the return to campus, we are making significant investments in testing, protective equipment, and information technology, as well as modifying our instruction and facilities. We are partnering closely with local and state public health officials to plan and communicate testing and contact tracing activities.

As we begin to ramp up for fall, however, all our campuses face significant additional expenses and uncertainties in the coming months. As Congress considers the next federal response to the pandemic, we ask for additional support to help us continue to fulfill our mission to provide quality education and valuable research to benefit our students, our state, and the nation. Please see the attached addendum, "Key Funding and Policy Priorities for Phase IV Federal Emergency Supplemental Funding Bill."

We want to reiterate our sincere gratitude for the federal support provided to our nation's colleges and universities. At the UW System, we are committed to providing a safe and quality education to our students this upcoming academic year and to partnering with our communities to recover from the pandemic and emerge stronger than ever.

Sincerely,


Tommy G. Thompson
President, UW System

KEY FUNDING AND POLICY PRIORITIES FOR PHASE IV FEDERAL EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING BILL

Testing/PPE

Recommendation: Provide funding to institutions of higher education for testing and PPE.

Testing (\$60 million): Much of our institutions' ability to have people return to campus safely relies on our ability to test students and employees to effectively identify, track, and stop any spread on our campuses. We ask for \$60 million for the Fall 2020 semester to support overall testing at UW institutions. Our testing will focus primarily on students, including testing symptomatic students as well as sampling to monitor the prevalence of infections in residence halls or in programs such as athletics. The majority of employee testing will be done by their own health care providers. We will reassess testing needs for Spring 2021 and may request additional support for that work.

PPE (\$50 million): UW institutions are determining their supply and equipment needs, including cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer and soap, masks, and other protective equipment. We anticipate these expenditures will continue for several years given the likely higher expectations for protection and cleaning in the future. We ask for \$50 million to reimburse UW institutions for expenditures related to supply and equipment needs for 2020-21.

Relief for Students and Institutions

Recommendation: Support the request of the national higher education associations for \$47 billion in direct aid to institutions and students.

We greatly appreciate the HEROES Act's recognition of the need for additional aid to institutions and students, which includes \$26.7 billion in funding. However, we ask Congress to approve the higher education community's request for \$47 billion for institutional aid and student aid that flows directly to institutions as opposed to passing through the Governor's office.

Our institutions have already distributed the vast majority of the student emergency grant aid provided in the CARES Act, and they will require additional funding to provide emergency grants in the fall. In addition to emergency grant support for students, support is needed to address the emotional and mental health needs of students as well. We are investing in increased support for students through telemedicine during this critical period, including behavioral health.

The funding for institutional relief will also support investments in IT infrastructure and cybersecurity, which we estimate at \$25 million. Investments in these areas are needed to support in-person instruction, improved on-line instruction, and improved security. Having a robust IT and cybersecurity infrastructure is more important than ever as many people work from home or will take classes online.

Financial Aid Support

Recommendation: Work with the Department of Education to modify the current FAFSA to include questions and data about financial changes since the 2018 tax year.

Given the uncertain and changing economic conditions, many families and students may need to work with their financial aid offices to update their FAFSA using expected 2020 income and assets. The Department of Education can make the following changes to the FAFSA to help students and families for the fall semester: (1) modifying the FAFSA to include a question on whether income and assets have significantly decreased since 2018; (2) sending a notice to families filing the FAFSA for 2020-21 to advise them of the new question and to update their information; (3) and collecting expected income and asset value for the 2020 tax year. Institutions expect to be inundated with requests to use updated income data when calculating their EFC for 2020-21. Modifying the FAFSA would streamline the process and mitigate possible roadblocks to receiving vital financial aid.

Research and Development

Recommendation: Support the request of the national higher education associations for \$26 billion to support research and development.

One of the most effective ways our institutions can help the economy bounce back is through direct investments in research and development. UW-Whitewater's Fiscal Economic Research Center estimated that federally funded research supports 18,831 jobs in Wisconsin with a total economic output of almost \$1.95 billion for the state of Wisconsin.

Many of our institutions are also doing vital research to learn more about this virus and develop treatments and vaccines to put an end to this pandemic. The HEROES Act provides \$3 billion to NIH to support research, but it does not offset other costs, nor does it include supplemental funding to other agencies. We encourage Congress to prioritize investments in research and development to support the full request from the higher education community for \$26 billion.

Other Relevant Provisions

Finally, we would ask that as other provisions are discussed that consideration be given to their possible application to institutions of higher education for inclusion as appropriate.