April 23, 2020

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Minority Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW), I am writing to express our strong support for providing significant additional new support for the workforces who sustain our nation's higher education system.

Before going further, I want to thank you for taking quick action to protect our communities by passing the CARES Act and including financial support for agencies including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation, and others. However, additional support for the workers who sustain our nation's higher education system: the student employees, postdocs, staff scientists, technicians, librarians, support staff, and many others who are integral to the ability of Universities to emerge from this crisis and continue to perform leading-edge research and instruction. This support is vital to the longstanding partnership between government, universities, and labor unions, whose work is critical to public health and economic growth and recovery, both for our members and the many others whose health and security will depend on rapid and effective research-based solutions.

This will help ensure that our research on COVID-19 continues and can keep pace with the scale of the crisis. Everyone has a role in solving this dual public health and economic crisis. UAW represents 80,000 workers at Universities across the country--including teaching and research assistants, postdoctoral researchers, research scientists, administrative staff, faculty, engineers, and staff scientists, supporting and completing the frontline research that is critical to understanding, planning, and mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UAW members are helping lead the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and to maintain our communities' quality of life. Our members are helping develop and administer diagnostic tests, carrying out research in pursuit of potential treatments and vaccines, and developing ventilators and personal protective equipment. Our members are modeling how the disease spreads and what steps need to be taken to minimize its impact. Our members are teaching classes so that students can continue to have access to skills and knowledge and can complete their degrees. Our members have proudly stepped up to do our part to accommodate the strain of the current moment but as the shutdown continues, funding shortfalls could become catastrophic.

I write therefore with urgency to request additional support for the workforces who sustain our nation's higher education system: the student employees, postdocs, staff scientists, technicians, librarians, support staff, and many others who are integral to the ability of Universities to emerge from this crisis and continue to perform leading-edge research and instruction. This support is vital to the longstanding partnership between government, universities, and labor unions, whose work is critical to public health

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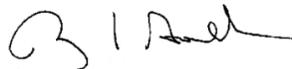
While everyone is dealing with the impacts of this crisis, many of our members struggle with additional burdens. International students and scholars, for example, face travel restrictions, visa processing delays, work authorization deadlines, and lack of access to social service programs. Others of our members who have fixed-term appointments or hold student status are uncertain as to whether safety net programs that have admirably expanded at Congress' charge will apply to them. All our members are facing an increasingly tight job market, and non-citizens cannot even apply for work outside of University if their positions are lost. Thus, the same workforce that is currently battling COVID-19 and working to protect our entire communities are themselves particularly vulnerable to lost employment.

We therefore urge you to provide:

1. Supplemental appropriations for federal agencies and direct support to institutions to continue to employ personnel until operations return to full speed. This should include attending to necessary regulatory measures to ensure that this support can be used for wages, benefits and tuition support for all personnel. Recommendations by the Association of American Universities (see April 14th) letter detail a minimum $26 billion appropriations need.

2. Support for international students and scholars. Provide sufficient funding for the State Department and USCIS to take all necessary steps to clear visa backlogs and ensure that those who are already here can receive the support they need to remain safely in place and those who wish to come here to work and study in the future face minimal obstacles.

3. Additional funding for students and institutions via the Education Stabilization Fund (at least $46.6 billion) so that student financial need is met, and people hit hardest by the economic and health impacts of the pandemic can continue to afford to go to school.

4. Tax fixes and adjustments so that institutions can have access to revenue sources that other employers received through the CARES Act (e.g. FMLA and Payroll Tax Credits)

We are ready to work with your offices to elaborate on these measures. Thank you for your quick action and your continued service during these unprecedented times. We remain ready to do our part to secure safe and healthy communities and to continue to prosper after we have weathered the worst of the crisis.

Sincerely,

Rory L. Gamble
President
International Union, UAW

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