

Dear Senators and Representatives,

As regents and trustees of Washington's public community and technical colleges and baccalaureate institutions, we thank you for the higher education investments you have made to complete a comeback of magnificent proportions following the devastation left by the Great Recession. As you now turn to rebalance the state's pandemic-weary budget, we urge you to protect the progress we have made, recognizing that higher education is critical to an inclusive economic recovery we all seek.

Economic downturns have a way of elevating higher education's value proposition. That's never been more true as the COVID-19 pandemic has called out and exacerbated historic inequities, with people of color suffering disproportionately high rates of hospitalization, job loss and all associated downstream effects. Where you work and the economic conditions that work affords matter.

Higher education is uniquely qualified to advance social mobility for all. Our colleges and universities owe their existence to the cause of ensuring a college credential isn't reserved for just the privileged classes.

Data from both the Great Recession and COVID-19 pandemic eras continue to show that employment and earnings improve with every level of educational attainment. Higher education recession-proofs careers and, in the case of the pandemic, is dictating who is working from home and who isn't working at all.

That's why we ask that you avoid repeating mistakes from the past that reduced higher education investment during times of economic downturn. During the Great Recession, our colleges and universities shared an astonishing burden with our students in the form of deep appropriation reductions that were only partially backfilled by aggressive tuition increases. Reductions were so deep that our colleges and universities returned to pre-recession funding levels just last year despite providing a whole new level of service. New reductions — especially prescriptive ones such as furloughs — disproportionately impact first generation and low-income

students and complicate efforts to economize and provide high-demand service in a highly-constrained environment.

Thanks to you, great advancements have enhanced affordability, bolstered academic success for students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, and increased degree production in high demand fields such as computer science, engineering, medicine, nursing and education. Enrollments have grown by the thousands, and additional outreach and delivery points to increased accessibility. New aid to bolster academic performance of students from underrepresented backgrounds and provide mental health service for all students has greatly helped promote completion.

Most recently, the Legislature took historic steps to support our students and families by passing the Workforce Education Investment Act to promote access, affordability, and student success. **All this progress is worth protecting.**

As we emerge from the current crisis, our economy will be reshaped in many ways. Displaced workers and future students will need more training and educational opportunities, not fewer. COVID-19 has highlighted critical workforce shortages that must be addressed through education and training programs at both our community and technical colleges and four-year colleges and universities. **Higher education will play a critical role in an inclusive recovery strategy.**

We stand ready to work with you to lead an inclusive recovery that produces a Washington workforce for Washington jobs.

Sincerely,

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