

Federal Policy and Advocacy Update

LEGISLATIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE

On May 26, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona testified before the House Education and Labor Committee to outline the U.S. Department of Education's FY 2023 appropriations priorities. In his remarks, Mr. Cardona urged the committee to support the administration's proposed \$1,775 increase to the maximum Pell Grant award for the 2023-24 award year, calling it a "down payment" on the President's vision to double the Pell by 2029. He also stressed the administration's commitment to closing equity gaps in college access and completion, and highlighted the proposed Retention and Completion Grant program and a \$282 million increase for Minority-Serving Institutions as critical tools for institutions to provide educational supports to low-income and underserved students.

On May 17, the House passed H.R. 7309, a bill that would reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the nation's primary workforce law. H.R. 7309 would substantially increase funding for job training programs for dislocated workers and would require community college representation on state workforce boards. The bill would also codify the Labor Department's Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants (SCCTG) program, which helps fund employment and training programs in in-demand industries. The bill faces an uphill battle to passage in the Senate, as Republicans are opposed to the measure due to provisions that would promote racial and gender equity in job training programs.

ADMINISTRATION UPDATE

On May 19, the U.S. Department of Education announced the extension of a temporary waiver that narrows verification requirements for students to access federal financial aid programs through completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The Department will only maintain verification requirements that strictly focus on identity theft and fraud for the remainder of the 2022-2023 award year, but will continue to waive any remaining verification requirements to provide relief to students amid the ongoing public health emergency stemming from the pandemic.

On May 18, the Department of Education released new guidance on how colleges can use Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) from the American Rescue Plan to invest in programs that support student mental health. For example, institutions may use HEERF dollars to implement or expand immediate crisis support and teletherapy to students and wellness resources for staff. The Department also clarified that institutions may use HEERF grants to provide substance use disorder services for students, faculty and staff, among other allowable uses.