

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, and Education Appropriations  
260 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, and Education Appropriations  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

We write to thank you for your strong support of the Federal TRIO Programs and to request that you continue to provide robust funding for these programs in the fiscal year (FY) 2020 Labor, Health, and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill. For the last several years, your Subcommittee has provided historic levels of support for the Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) and the low-income, first-generation students that they serve. As you prepare your FY 2020 appropriations bill, we ask that, once again, you prioritize the academic, financial, and cultural supportive services provided by TRIO and reject proposals to consolidate, significantly change, or eliminate any of these programs.

Through TRIO, the federal government works to ensure that all students have equal access to a college education and the supports they need to successfully prepare for, persist in, and graduate from higher education programs. Students from the lowest-income families earn college degrees at a rate that is five times lower than students from the highest income families (11 percent versus 58 percent). Thanks to the TRIO programs, many low-income and first generation college students receive the supportive services necessary to consider pursuing and persisting toward a college education. Without a degree, these students fail to achieve the increased earning power that would help them to repay student debts and to pursue their chosen careers.


During FY 2020, the Department of Education will host the next grant competition for the TRIO Student Support Services program (SSS) – the largest and most expansive program promoting college persistence for low-income students. SSS is one of eight TRIO programs aimed specifically at increasing college retention and graduation rates of participants. SSS students receive academic tutoring, advice and assistance in postsecondary course selection, information on student financial aid, personal and academic career counseling, career guidance, and enrollment assistance. Despite the increases in TRIO funding over the last several years, funding apportioned by the Department of Education for the SSS program has remained somewhat stagnant, which, combined with increased costs of providing services, has resulted in an overall decrease in the number of SSS students and programs.

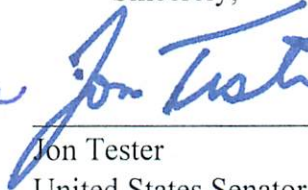
SSS has demonstrated its capacity to enable students to persist and ultimately graduate from college. In a 2015 report, the Department of Education found that participation in SSS resulted in statistically significant increases in student retention and transfer, grade point averages, and credit accumulation. Additionally, SSS participants outperformed other low-income and first-

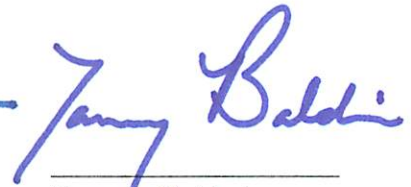
generation students and students with disabilities who did not participate in these programs in degree completion at both two-year colleges and four-year colleges.

We appreciate the Committee's continued and increased investment in TRIO in recent years. Given its proven success and the ever-present need to address issues of access, affordability, and completion in students' higher education, we respectfully request your support of robust funding for TRIO in FY 2020.

Sincerely,

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jon Tester  
United States Senator

  
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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator