



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

April 9, 2020

Dear College and University Presidents:

These are unprecedented and challenging times for your students and for you. I know you find yourselves grappling with issues you never imagined, and I want to assure you we are here to support you in your missions and to quickly provide the resources and flexibilities you need to continue educating your students. That's why we're focused on implementing the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act quickly and faithfully.

I gave my team a charge as soon as the CARES Act was signed into law: get support to those most in need as quickly as possible. That starts with college students whose lives have been disrupted, many of whom are facing financial challenges and struggling to make ends meet.

As you know, the CARES Act provides several different methods for distributing roughly \$14 billion in funds to institutions of higher education. The most significant portion of that funding allocation provides that \$12.56 billion will be distributed to institutions using a formula based on student enrollment. Of the amount allocated to each institution under this formula, at least 50 percent must be reserved to provide students with emergency financial aid grants to help cover expenses related to the disruption of campus operations due to coronavirus. We are prioritizing this funding stream in order to get money in the hands of students in need as quickly as possible.

The CARES Act provides institutions with significant discretion on how to award this emergency assistance to students. This means that each institution may develop its own system and process for determining how to allocate these funds, which may include distributing the funds to all students or only to students who demonstrate significant need. The only statutory requirement is that the funds be used to cover expenses related to the disruption of campus operations due to coronavirus (including eligible expenses under a student's cost of attendance, such as food, housing, course materials, technology, health care, and child care). With that said, I would like to encourage the leadership of each institution to prioritize your students with the greatest need, but at the same time consider establishing a maximum funding threshold for each student to ensure that these funds are distributed as widely as possible. As a point of reference, you might consider using the maximum Federal Pell grant (for the 2019-2020 academic year, \$6,195) as that threshold. In addition, if you determine that your institution's students do not have significant financial need at this time, I would ask that you consider giving your allocation to those institutions within your state or region that might have significant need.

In order to access these funds, all institutions must sign and return the Certificate of Funding and Agreement via: [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) (<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration.html>), acknowledging the terms and conditions of the funding. After the Department has received the

certificate, institutions may draw down their emergency assistance funds using the Department's G5 system.

The Department is also working expeditiously to allocate the remaining funding that is reserved for institutional use, and we will provide details on how institutions may apply for this institutional funding, as well as for other emergency funding, in the coming days. Thank you for your continued work on behalf of America's students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert D. O'Neil", is positioned above a solid black rectangular redaction box.