

May 3, 2024

Written Testimony of Rev. Michael J. Garanzini, S.J.
President, Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee

On behalf of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), I submit the following testimony for your consideration. It offers recommendations for programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Our U.S. member institutions, which are located in seventeen states and the District of Columbia, and include Baccalaureate colleges and doctoral universities, are places of learning and formation. Our Jesuit tradition embraces *Cura Personalis*, or care for the whole person: with that comes a deep commitment to the needs of each other and our communities. For the more than 212,000 students enrolled at Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, we seek to support them as they pursue academic, physical, and spiritual growth. With new knowledge, skills and awareness, our graduates are prepared for lives and careers dedicated to advancing the greater good.

This Subcommittee faces significant constraints in Fiscal Year 2025 that were imposed by the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023. AJCU urges you to consider the foundational role of educational investments in the workings of all areas of government, as well as fostering growth of the private sector. Our nation's economic engine depends on a knowledgeable society that can support innovations in sectors like health care, engineering, technology, agriculture, national defense, diplomacy, and so many others. Without robust funding for education, other government spending will fall flat.

We urge the Subcommittee to increase the federal programs listed below:

Increase the **maximum Pell Grant** to **\$13,000**. The sooner we can increase the maximum Pell, the faster we can realize the benefits of expanding access and opportunity, especially to underserved populations. It is worth noting that one quarter of Jesuit college and university students receive a Pell Grant.

Provide **\$1.15 billion** for the **Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG)** program and **\$1.603 billion** for the **Federal Work Study (FWS)** program. These amounts reflect inflationary increases. Together, these programs support millions of students with economic need as they seek advancement. At Jesuit colleges and universities, more than 10% of students receive SEOG or FWS grants.

Invest **\$1.26 billion** in **TRIO** and **\$410 million** in the **Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)**: programs that level the opportunity playing field for first-generation students.

Support **International education programs**. These programs are also critical, particularly in the

role they play to nurture global citizens, who are keenly aware of their place and responsibility to lead in an increasingly interconnected world. We ask that you provide **\$90.804 million** for these Title VI programs.

Fund the **Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN)** program. It is small but critical in supporting students who are planning careers in high-demand areas: we ask that you provide **\$35 million** for this program.

Tackle the mental health needs of students. One of the biggest challenges facing our students today is mental health: suicide remains the second leading cause of death among college students, and mental health struggles are linked to lower grade point averages and attrition. SAMHSA's **Campus Suicide Prevention** program helps schools tackle the mental health needs of their students. We urge you to make a **\$12 million** investment in the Campus Suicide Prevention program and increase funding to **\$50 million** for the **GLS State/Tribal Youth Suicide program**, which also supports college and university efforts in mental health.

Finally, we urge the Subcommittee to lead efforts to protect students, as well as colleges and universities, from the devastating impact of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) crisis. We are poised to lose a cohort of students, who by no fault of their own, are being prevented from obtaining a post-secondary education due to gross mismanagement of the FAFSA process. Institutions of higher education may be pushed over a fiscal cliff because of delays and mistakes in the FAFSA. To date, FAFSA completion is down by nearly 30% with just 32.9% of the high school class of 2024 having completed the form. In more bad news, 30% of the Institutional Student Information Records (ISIRs) sent by the Department to colleges and universities were faulty and are still awaiting reprocessing.

In response, we ask that you clarify that institutions that over-award students based on initial FAFSA reports/ISIRs from the U.S. Department of Education will not be required to take back funds from students if their aid eligibility is later reduced due to the ongoing FAFSA corrections process. Now that there is greater awareness about the magnitude of this system collapse, Congress must take steps to correct it.

At Jesuit colleges and universities, we prepare our students to use their knowledge and gifts to make the world a better place. The decisions made by this Subcommittee are essential to creating pathways toward learning for all students, regardless of economic status. Your work is essential to our nation's continued solvency and prosperity. Thank you for your time and attention, as well as your dedication to our nation's students.