

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 1, 2004

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education
Committee on Appropriations
190 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education
Committee on Appropriations
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Specter and Ranking Member Harkin:

We are writing to express our strong support for a significant increase in the fiscal year 2005 appropriations bill for the TRIO Programs – one of the nation's most important education programs designed to advance equal educational opportunity in America's colleges and universities.

More than 1,200 colleges, universities and agencies offer over 2,700 TRIO Programs, serving nearly 873,000 students throughout the United States, and an estimated two million TRIO students have graduated from college. However, even with all of this success, TRIO Programs currently only serve an estimated 7 percent of those students who are eligible for the programs.

One example of the importance of the TRIO Programs continues to be demonstrated during times of economic downturn. TRIO Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs) and Student Support Service (SSS) programs see an escalation in the demand for program services as adults lose their jobs and need to upgrade their skills because they can not get a job with their current skills and/or need a career change. EOCs throughout the country continue to be contacted by local companies to provide educational guidance and career counseling to hundreds of employees that have been laid off. SSS projects also see a growing number of displaced workers on their college campuses that desperately need assistance to obtain a postsecondary education so that they are able to get a job.

Providing TRIO with a significant increase will allow the program to maintain existing services and expand its capacity to reach additional students. For example, a \$50 million increase for the program would allow for one hundred additional SSS grants to colleges and universities, helping 21,000 more college students and adults to successfully pursue a postsecondary education, as well as help to maintain the current level of services in all other existing TRIO projects.

The Subcommittee is to be commended for its strong commitment to the TRIO Programs over the past few years, as it has expanded student access to the program. While we understand the need to balance priorities, we hope you will agree that the TRIO Programs need a significant increase in fiscal year 2005 to continue providing vital educational services to the students who depend on the programs and the millions of others who currently do not have access to a college education without the assistance of TRIO.

Thank you for considering our request, and we look forward to working with you to support this important program.