March 4, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Committee on Education & the Workforce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education & the Workforce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott:

As economic stewards of cities, the nation’s mayors strongly support higher education access and success to better prepare our workforce and propel America’s prosperity and competitiveness. As such, we urge you to enact America’s College Promise in order to bring our nation’s historic commitment to public education in support of a strong economy into the 21st Century. The President’s proposal for America’s College Promise is inspired by city and state programs that are proving to be beacons of success, but we know that as our cities and metropolitan areas compete with other regions around the globe, a patchwork of skills gaps across America puts our economic security at risk.

At the 81st Annual Conference of Mayors in 2013, The U.S. Conference of Mayors endorsed a goal for the nation to achieve the highest proportion of students graduating from college in the world by 2020, and the goal that all Americans should be prepared to enroll in at least one year of higher education or job training to secure America as a world leader in the proportion of citizens completing college. We resolved to work with Congress to restructure and dramatically expand college financial aid, address college completion and strengthen the higher education pipeline to ensure that more students succeed and complete their degree; and invest in community colleges to equip a greater share of young people and adults with high-demand skills and education for emerging industries.

Beyond the extension of universal public education to match modern workforce demands, America’s College Promise is wholly in keeping with our adopted policy in that it pushes colleges to increase completion rates, align programs to workforce needs, and encourage students to do the kinds of things that are associated with
successful certificate and degree completion (such as enrolling at least half-time, sticking with a “program of study” and making progress toward it rather than taking random classes, etc), without mandates or regulations. The Promise approach demands shared responsibility and contribution from government, colleges, and students - a collaborative partnership approach that mayors strongly endorse.

One of the most pervasive challenges in our cities is persistent levels of unemployment and underemployment even in the face of unfilled jobs with local companies. The skills gap is threatening the economic strength of our cities and our nation. To challenge this threat head-on, the nation’s mayors urge you to enact America’s College Promise to meet the challenge.

Kevin Johnson
Mayor of Sacramento
President

Christopher L. Cabaldon
Mayor of West Sacramento
Chair, Jobs, Education and the Workforce Standing Committee

Tom Cochran
CEO and Executive Director

Ralph Becker, Mayor of Salt Lake City, UT
William Bell, Mayor of Durham, NC
Steve Benjamin, Mayor of Columbus, SC
David Berger, Mayor of Lima, OH
Luigi Boria, Mayor of Doral, FL
David Bowers, Mayor of Roanoke, VA
Michael Brennan, Mayor of Portland, ME
Alvin Brown, Mayor of Jacksonville, FL
Byron Brown, Mayor of Buffalo, NY
Robert Cluck, Mayor of Arlington, TX
Christopher Coleman, Mayor of Saint Paul, MN
Michael Coleman, Mayor of Columbus, OH
Joy Cooper, Mayor of Hallandale Beach, FL
Demeza Delhomme, Mayor of Spring Valley, NY
James Diossa, Mayor of Central Falls, RI
Denny Doyle, Mayor of Beaverton, OR
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Bill Finch, Mayor of Bridgeport, CT
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Robert Garcia, Mayor of Long Beach, CA

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Slyvester “Sly” James, Mayor of Kansas City, MO
John Linder, Mayor of Chester, PA
Mark Mitchell, Mayor of Tempe, AZ
Jeri Muioo, Mayor of West Palm Beach, FL
Michael Nutter, Mayor of Philadelphia, PA
Frank Ortis, Mayor of Pembroke Pines, FL
Annise Parker, Mayor of Houston, TX
Ed Pawlowski, Mayor of Allentown, PA
Kitty Piercy, Mayor of Eugene, OR
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Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Mayor of Baltimore, MD
Joseph Riley, Mayor of Charleston, SC
Madeline Rogero, Mayor of Knoxville, TN
Pedro Segarra, Mayor of Hartford, CT
Greg Stanton, Mayor of Phoenix, AZ
Mark Stodola, Mayor of Little Rock, AR
Marilyn Strickland, Mayor of Tacoma, WA
Lester Taylor, Mayor of East Orange, NJ
Setti Warren, Mayor of Newton, MA
Shelley Welsch, Mayor of University City, MO
AC Wharton, Mayor of Memphis, TN
Dennis P. Williams, Mayor of Wilmington, DE