

January 5, 2010

The Honorable Chip Limehouse
South Carolina House of Representatives
P.O. Box 11867
Columbia, SC 29211-1867

Dear Representative Limehouse:

I write to you today on behalf of over 32,000 students who attend one of South Carolina's twenty independent colleges and universities. Most of these students depend upon the needs-based Higher Education Tuition Grants Program or one of the state's merit-based scholarships to be able to attend the college of their choice.

The prolonged recession and the concomitant effects of increased unemployment and escalating costs jeopardizes a student's ability to pay for a college education and places an even higher premium on all types of state financial aid for postsecondary education. This is why it is imperative that FY 2011 funding for the Tuition Grants Program as well as the Palmetto Fellows, LIFE, HOPE, Lottery Tuition Assistance, and Need-based scholarships be maintained at this year's (FY 2010) levels.

Any reduction in the state's level of support will have a devastating effect on students, especially those who are in the middle of their degree programs. As a consequence, many students will have to further mortgage their future by increasing their student loan debt, dropping out of school, or transferring to a public college or university.

While transferring to a less expensive state-supported college will help students and their families in the short term, it will actually cost the state more because the FY 2009 per student subsidy at a public college or university was \$4486 compared to the average Tuition Grant award of \$3006 per student. Because of an increase in qualified applicants, the average Tuition Grant in FY 2010 is only \$2474.

In addition, more than 14,225 students receive Tuition Grants, and public higher education institutions do not have the physical capacity or faculty to be able to absorb an appreciable number of students who would otherwise attend an in-state independent college or university.

In a related matter, SCICU member institutions urge you to restore \$2 million in funding for the Partnership Among South Carolina's Academic Libraries (PASCAL). This cutting-edge consortium involving 58 public and private institutions of higher learning is critical to the academic enrichment of students and faculty alike and has a strong bearing on institutional accreditation. Academic libraries not only serve students, but in most instances, they also serve as the intellectual and cultural center for the surrounding communities.

We realize that you are dealing with budgetary issues of historic proportions. Our institutions are facing very similar challenges and are doing everything they can to reduce their expenditures while preserving the core of their mission which is to provide a quality liberal arts education to the students they serve. In spite of significant losses in endowment earnings and donations, independent colleges and universities are trying to hold the line on tuition increases while increasing institutional aid to students.

As full partners in the state's efforts to raise per capita income and attract investment through higher education, we ask that you do not retreat from the current level of funding but stand strong in the face of a temporary financial crisis by keeping South Carolina's commitment to higher education from backsliding. Any reduction at all will cause South Carolina to lose even more ground in the battle to educate and retain the best and brightest students and will take years to recover. Education is a long-term proposition and our state's goals in this critical area should not be set aside even for the briefest of periods.

Thank you for your time and attention to this request. We appreciate the work that you do and recognize the very difficult challenges that face you.

Yours truly,

Mike LeFever
President & CEO