



May 15, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Chairman  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy  
Ranking Member  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee  
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

AccessLex Institute® is pleased to offer its support for S. 1344, the *Emergency Grant Aid for College Students Act*. Introduced on April 27, 2023 by Senator Tina Smith (D-MN), the *Emergency Grant Aid for College Students Act* would authorize a grant program for institutions to provide emergency grants to students experiencing unexpected financial emergencies.

AccessLex Institute, in partnership with its nearly 200 nonprofit and state-affiliated ABA-approved member law schools, has been committed to improving access to legal education and to maximizing the affordability and value of a law degree since 1983. The AccessLex Center for Legal Education Excellence® advocates for policies that make legal education work better for students and society alike and conducts research on the most critical issues facing legal education today.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, Congress created the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund to provide institutions with aid to help them navigate through the pandemic's economic fallout. One of the requirements for receiving the aid was that at least half of the funds received would be provided directly to students in the form of emergency grants, which would not be counted as Estimated Financial Assistance (EFA), for COVID-related expenses. By doing so, this money made it into the hands of students quickly, without the delays that can arise as the result of federal rules and definitions, like EFA.

Time-sensitive financial emergencies like medical bills aren't limited to a pandemic and can upend a student's already precarious financial situation, sometimes leading to dropping out of school. To remedy this, Congress must ensure that emergency grants flow quickly and seamlessly to students who have urgent needs. That is why AccessLex supports the *Emergency Grant Aid for College Students Act* because it removes unnecessary restrictions such as those caused by EFA and allows students to more easily receive the critical funding they need during an emergency.

The COVID-19 pandemic shone a light on the need to get emergency aid into the hands of students as quickly as possible, and [AccessLex has been advocating for policy changes](#) to do just that since 2020. In March of that year, in response to the pandemic, we made available \$5 million through the [Law Student Emergency Relief Program](#) to our nearly 200 member law schools to distribute to students experiencing emergencies. The money from the program went to each school's designated student emergency fund, allowing schools to administer the funds in a manner consistent with their established criteria for emergency relief. A grant program such as this gives schools the flexibility to determine which emergencies qualify for aid, which criteria should be applied, and the maximum award. Structuring an emergency grant program in this way can increase the effectiveness of the program and the speed at which funds are delivered to students in need.

More recently, we recommended that [Congress continue to fund an emergency grant aid program](#) that does not treat this aid as EFA, much like this bill does. We urge Congress to take the lessons learned from the pandemic and ensure that students facing emergencies do not have to wait needlessly for available aid because of red tape.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [cchapman@accesslex.org](mailto:cchapman@accesslex.org) or Nancy Conneely, Managing Director of Policy, at [nconneely@accesslex.org](mailto:nconneely@accesslex.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Chris P. Chapman".

Christopher P. Chapman  
President and Chief Executive Officer