

Dear Members Joint Task Force On Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education,

I am writing to you as a former educator, mother and daughter of immigrant parents navigating the complexities of systems in the United States of America. When Representative Ruiz posted a request for testimony from students regarding barriers to success in college, I felt compelled to share my excitement for the desire to center student voices and my concerns about asking students to share their trauma and/or experiences with the pandemic and he encouraged me to share my concerns. I acknowledge these are conflicting feelings but important to understand as we navigate life post-pandemic. For starters, I will share stories from my experience as a high school teacher:

- A student would arrive late to school every day for my class - when I finally asked him why, he shared that he gets his younger sister ready for school every day and has to drop her first. *This is not a student issue - this is a systems issue.*
- A student made a poor choice on social media by posting something about his girlfriend - when the police got involved, he was asked if he wanted his parents present for questioning. His undocumented mother insisted he cooperate with the police (the opposite of what most of us today would tell our kids to do). Rather than offer these students restorative justice, compassion and conflict mediation, we involved the police. *This is not a student issue - this is a systems issue.*
- A student who has had family detained and deported continues to share her financial concerns navigating college, access to healthcare and staying connected to her family - *this is not a student issue - this is a systems issue.*
- A student who is struggling to find affordable childcare so she can finish school - *this is not a student issue - this is a systems issue.*
- A student whose parents are refugees - they were professionals in their home country but in America, they are working hourly wage roles to support them. The parents do not have the language or sense to navigate getting their students' support in schools - *this is not a student issue - this is a systems issue.*

I applaud your desire to talk directly to students about what their barriers are. For many, however, the students most harmed by oppressive systems, they will not have the access or voice to come testify and share their stories. They are struggling between housing, healthcare, food insecurity and more. And, we know they were already having a hard time **before** the pandemic. The pandemic just exacerbated the issues. I encourage you to continue to examine the systems that have created the outcomes for our students: unaffordable housing, lack of childcare, inconsistent healthcare, unfair criminal justice practices and more. The solutions are in better wraparound services for students at all levels; it's building trust with communities and helping them navigate the complexities of housing and healthcare - all which are human rights.

Thank you for your time,

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