

Chairwoman Wilson, Ranking Member Murphy, members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. I value the opportunity to come before you on behalf of all students across the nation whose educations have been disrupted by the pandemic and who have relied on emergency aid to remain financially afloat and continue pursuing their degrees. The fact that my experience during this challenging period is in many ways not unique is a testament to the severity of this crisis and the ongoing need for federal relief.

I am a senior at Florida International University studying recreation and sports management. Since my freshman year, I have benefited from the support of fellow students, teachers, and a positive campus environment. This support network has been critical to helping me remain focused and weather many of the challenges that have arisen in the past year.

I am also a proud graduate of the South Florida TRIO Program, which enabled me to form long-lasting relationships with instructors and students who have been a consistent source of motivation. My program instructor, Ms. Tiffani, regularly checks in with me and my family. There was a point in time where I was even contemplating whether or not college was for me. In the end I was able to go to my peers within the program and they were encouraging me to continue pushing through and now I'm in a position where I'm getting ready to graduate! Ms. Tiffani and others provided the guidance and mentorship I needed to not only continue my education but also enjoy it.

In the past year, these supportive relationships have been more important than ever.

When the pandemic hit, my education was disrupted, I had to suspend my internship, and I lost my job. I had been working for two months before the start of the semester, which enabled me to move into an apartment and forgo taking out additional loans. Losing that income was a heavy blow. So it was a great relief when a few weeks later, I received emergency funds from FIU that were made available through the CARES Act. This aid helped me purchase school supplies and keep up with bills.

Without that financial support, I would have been forced to jeopardize my future by taking out loans that I hadn't planned for.

The second round of aid that I received through the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act has similarly provided a lifeline that gave me the opportunity to continue my studies without added financial stress.

This has been critically important because even without having to worry about replacing the income I lost when my job ended, it has been challenging to remain focused on my studies. Although I haven't allowed myself to become discouraged or to give up, COVID-19 has had a huge effect on my ability to stay motivated. I struggled with the transition to virtual learning and not having the same support network around me. Without the presence of my peers and teachers, I felt more alone and forced to rely only on my own strength.

Still, it has been my relationships with mentors, counselors, and other students that have enabled me to remain on track.

With their continued support, and thanks to the emergency financial aid I received, I look forward to graduating as soon as this summer.

I would like to thank the members of this committee for thinking of students across the United States, who, like me, suddenly had to take on unexpected costs when the pandemic hit, and for delivering meaningful relief.

I would also urge you to continue to provide support for students who are most in need. We represent the future and I, like many of my counterparts, want to use my degree to make an impact. But the high cost of higher education places a significant burden on us and our families. Receiving financial aid that removes some of this strain helps put students in a position to thrive.

As its name implies, FIU has an international focus, so I also want to speak to the importance of ensuring that international students have the same opportunities to succeed. They are pursuing the same dreams and have in many cases been equally impacted by the pandemic.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.