

March 23, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair
Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
State Capitol, Room 5094

The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair
Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 6026

RE: SUPPORT – \$15 MILLION ZERO-TEXTBOOK COST DEGREE PROPOSAL

Dear Chairs Skinner and Ting,

We are writing in support of Governor Newsom's proposed \$15 million one-time allocation of Proposition 98 funds for the California Community College (CCC) System's Zero-Textbook Cost (ZTC) Degree program. In 2016, \$5 million was included in the budget for the ZTC Degree program. It allowed 23 colleges to build 34 degree or certificate pathways which were entirely free of a textbook cost. It was an unqualified success. These 34 pathways saved over 23,000 students more than \$42 million--a more than 8x return on investment. With 7 in 10 community college students reporting being food or housing insecure, these savings make a critical difference in their ability to continue their studies. Another recent survey of college students showed that 25% needed to work extra hours to afford course materials. 19% said that they decided what course to take based on the cost of materials. Those costs forced one in nine students surveyed to skip meals. These stresses are only greater since the onset of the pandemic. Continuing the ZTC program is one proven step towards repairing a broken system. As Governor Newsom said at his January 8th budget press conference, "...we in California have an obligation to disrupt that entire system nationwide."

Beyond saving money, students enrolled in ZTC degree programs perform better in their classes. In a review of over 179,000 letter grades, the program boasts a 3.1% increase for ZTC students, compared to non-ZTC students. The results are even starker when looking at Pell recipients who see a 7.6% grade increase in ZTC pathways compared to non-ZTC Pell counterparts. In addition, minority ZTC students performed better academically than minority non-ZTC students. These outcomes show that the ZTC program can be a powerful tool in combating the equity gap that exists for students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds.

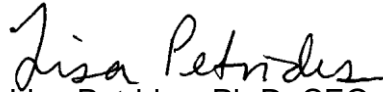
The ZTC Degree program has established a strong foundation for growth, and furthered positive impacts for successful student outcomes. Maintaining the proposed funding is crucial in the effort to ensure the cost of textbooks is not a barrier to success and completion for California's community college students. These graduates will be essential to rebuilding our economy.

We urge you to follow suit and increase access to college for all Californians by supporting the ZTC Degree Program in this budget cycle.

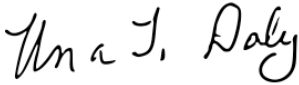
Sincerely,



Nicole Allen, Director
Open Education SPARC



Lisa Petrides, Ph.D, CEO and Founder
ISKME



Una Daly, Director
Community College Consortium
For Open Educational Resources



Michelle L. Pilati, Ph.D, Faculty Coordinator
Open Education Resources Initiative Academic
Senate for California Community Colleges



Dolores M. Davison, President
Academic Senate of California
Community Colleges



Debbie Raucher
Education Director
John Burton Advocates for Youth



Dr. Cable Green, Director
Creative Commons



Brian Rivas
Senior Director of Policy and Government Relations
The Education Trust-West



Laura Keane, Chief Policy Officer
uAspire



Emily Rusch, Executive Director
CALPIRG



Delmar Larsen, Executive Director
LibreTexts Project



Paul Stacey, Executive Director
Open Education Global



Gary K. Michelson, M.D.
Founder and Co-Chair
Michelson Center for Public Policy



Carrie R. Welton, Director of Policy & Advocacy
Hope Center for College, Community and Justice



Daniel Williamson, Managing Director
OpenStax, Rice University

cc: Senate President pro Tempore Toni G. Atkins – Senate Republican Leader Scott Wilk – Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon – Assembly Republican Leader Marie Waldron – Senator John Laird – Assembly Member Kevin McCarty