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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cal Grant (AB 1456)

Press release

Sacramento, California, February 25, 2021 — Today GENup, a youth-led education advocacy organization participated as a featured speaker in a roundtable discussion on AB 1456 Cal Grant Reform Act, with Assemblymembers Medina and McCarty, California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), and significant student leaders and community stakeholders to discuss critical financial aid expansion. This monumental bill would modernize Cal Grant to reflect the needs of college students across California, launching the conversation on fixing financial aid. Cal Grant is a financial aid program funded by the State of California that assists Californian undergraduates with tuition and fees based on their financial need and grade point average.

Because most Cal Grant awards have a minimum GPA requirement, access to the financial aid fails to consider the socioeconomic disadvantages that low-income students suffer from, such as fewer access to electronic devices, tutors, course offerings, or professional development opportunities that could be preventing them from achieving a GPA as high as their peers. These students do not have the equitable and fair opportunity to succeed among their high-income counterparts who can afford academic resources, which is seen in an 11.6 percent high school dropout rate among 16 to 24 year old individuals in low-income families, the highest rate (National Center for Education Statistics 2014). Therefore, students who need this financial aid the most might be excluded due to their low GPA that is caused by the same financial barriers. However, if AB 1456 passes, the GPA requirement would be eliminated under Cal Grant 2, giving low-income students access to the chances they were previously denied and enabling students to achieve their full potential.

Considering the current Cal Grant primarily invests in tuition costs for financial aid, this system does not support non-tuition costs, which forces students to gain their basic needs support through long work hours, accumulation of high student debt, or both. According to a recent report from the California Budget & Policy Center, over the last decade, the median rent in California has increased by 44 percent, while the maximum state financial aid for low-income students on non-tuition costs has only increased by 8 percent. Financial aid has not sufficiently increased nor accommodated for the rising costs of tuition and rent, causing low-income students to worry about their basic needs on top of the already stressful college course load and new environment.

Today's round table on modernizing the Cal Grant was a crucial first step to improving education equity in California's secondary educational institutions, and providing equal opportunities for low-income and disadvantaged students. We deserve the chance to learn how we can help this world because something as materialistic as money should not be what holds hardworking, extraordinary students back from the invaluable wisdom and opportunities that education can offer us on our path to our goals, our dreams and our futures. GENup is proud to support AB 1456 and work alongside Assemblymembers Medina and McCarthy to support California students of all socioeconomic status in their pursuit of quality higher education.