

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 26, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to you as strong supporters of Federal TRIO Programs that support college success for disadvantaged students. TRIO programs have opened doors for many students of color, first-generation students, and students from low-income families. While TRIO has provided life-changing services to many students, and despite the lack of a statutory requirement to limit service, they are limited to working with students who are U.S. citizens. Too often, students who have lived in the U.S. for almost their entire lives are turned away from participation in TRIO because of their immigration status. The citizenship requirement is a result of 2010 regulations and is not a requirement in statute. We write to encourage you to take swift action, through whatever means available to you, to eliminate the citizenship requirement and to expand the program to beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

The first Federal TRIO Program, Upward Bound, was established in the Educational Opportunity Act of 1964, and was created to remove barriers to college access and completion for disadvantaged youth. Since then, TRIO has grown to eight programs serving nearly 800,000 students in 2,800 programs across the country. TRIO Programs begin as early as middle school and continue through college, serving first-generation students from families at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty line. The programs provide mentoring, academic and financial counseling, and tutoring, and they create an invaluable community of support for their participants.

Today, almost half of states, through legislation or decisions by the state Board of Regents, allow undocumented students who meet certain requirements to receive in-state tuition rates. The opportunity to receive in-state tuition rates puts college within reach for many undocumented students. In-state tuition rates are, on average, several thousand dollars less than out-of-state tuition rates, and as a result of these savings, many colleges and universities have reported increases in the number of undocumented students enrolling in postsecondary education.

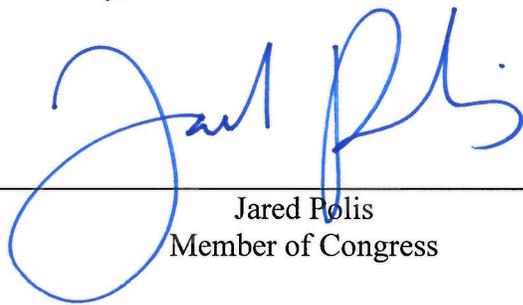
Many undocumented students who attend college or hope to attend college would benefit from participation in Federal TRIO Programs. In 2010, however, the Department of Education, finalized regulations under Title IV of the Higher Education Act that establishes a citizenship requirement for students participating in TRIO, a restriction above and beyond the statutory requirement. Federal TRIO Programs across the country, including those in our congressional districts, regularly turn away students because of their immigration status. Even though many students now have access to in-state tuition rates, they are unable to participate in the programs designed to enable and encourage their success.

We urge you to change the interpretation of the 2010 regulation and amend the eligibility requirements for Federal TRIO Programs to be consistent with requirements set out in DACA. This corresponding change to adapt TRIO to DACA would allow many students already eligible for in-state tuition rates to also receive support to encourage their success to and through college.

Deserving students have been denied access to Federal TRIO Programs for far too long. It is within your power to change the interpretation of or overturn the 2010 regulation, and we encourage you to do so swiftly and immediately.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. We look forward to working with you as your Administration implements this important change.

Sincerely,



Jared Polis
Member of Congress



Carlos Curbelo
Member of Congress