

April 8, 2009

**To: The Honorable Members of the Washington State Senate and
the Washington State House of Representatives**

From: Members of the Boards of Higher Education

Greetings:

Balancing a budget with a shortfall of nearly \$9 billion dollars is a difficult task, to say the least. We have great respect for the enormity of your challenge, and we are very appreciative of your efforts. Nonetheless, as appointed stewards of Washington State's public four-year higher educational institutions, we are deeply concerned that the magnitude of the reductions to higher education in the Senate and House operating budget proposals would result in significantly reduced access and quality at our state's public colleges and universities. *We ask that you give the institutions the tools and the opportunity to manage through this period of economic adversity so as to keep the door to higher education open to students from all backgrounds.* The key to this is tuition.

We firmly believe that if you will grant the institutions the option to increase resident undergraduate tuition up to the amount that has been suggested by the Governor and some legislators, not only would access to higher education be maintained to a significant degree, but it would be achieved without impacting the economic diversity of our students. Our institutions remain steadfast in their commitment to expand educational opportunity for low- and middle-income students. Unequivocally, an increase in tuition would be accompanied by an increase in financial aid. This authority would also help ensure that students already enrolled in the institutions do not suffer a significant decline in the quality of their educational experience.

Furthermore, through increases in aid and an expanded educational tax credit, the federal stimulus program has made it even more expedient for states facing budget crises to raise tuition at their public universities without passing the burden on to students and their families. Analyses by some of the institutions conclude that, with the new federal stimulus funding options available for students, resident undergraduates attending in the coming academic year from households making less than \$160,000 a year generally would not be impacted by a tuition increase of as much as 14 percent. The attached charts illustrate how tuition increases in amounts up to 14 percent would be offset for families at different income levels.

We pledge to you our continuing efforts to foster efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and innovation in the way that the institutions serve the citizens of Washington. If we are given the tools to do so, we can manage through this economic crisis. *We ask that you grant the institutions the flexibility to implement a fair and sensible solution—the option to increase undergraduate resident tuition.*

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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