August 27, 2014

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, California 95814

RE: AB 1976 (Quirk-Silva) Student financial aid: Competitive Cal Grant A and B Awards

REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Brown:

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, I urge you to sign Assembly Bill 1976 by Assembly Member Sharon Quirk-Silva. AB 1976 ensures that Cal Grant funds are fully utilized by providing new statutory authority and flexibility to the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC). The bill establishes a new formula to more accurately reach the state’s annual goal for Cal Grants, sets a statutory cap on the number of awards, and provides CSAC with the authority to exceed the cap in a given year and make adjustments as needed in subsequent years.

The Competitive Cal Grant Program offers 22,500 awards annually, but only 17,000 awards per year were paid by CSAC based on recent history. CSAC’s conservative position on awarding Cal Grants is based on fear of incurring liabilities the agency would not be able to fulfill. Without explicit statutory authority to over-award to a modest degree, which is provided in AB 1976, CSAC will continue its policy of under-awarding and in the process leave thousands of Cal Grant competitive awards unused.

AB 1976 represents a smart policy change in that it would increase Cal Grant awards without increasing state funding for the program. Community college students account for over 80 percent of all competitive awards. It is anticipated that an additional 2,300 community college students would receive a competitive Cal Grant award with enactment of AB 1976.

Our students’ ability to pay for college is a major factor impacting enrollment, college completion, and transfer to four-year institutions. AB 1976 offers CSAC a practical, highly efficient method to increase Cal Grant awards without increasing state funds, and provides many more community college students with the option to attend college full-time, devote more to time to academic pursuits, and achieve education goals in a timely manner.

I thank you for your consideration and urge you to sign Assembly Bill 1976. If you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (916) 445-4434.

Sincerely,

Brice W. Harris
Chancellor

cc: Assembly Member Sharon Quirk-Silva