WASHINGTON

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT NETWORKS

Sample Op-Ed

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Even before the pandemic hit, lower-income students, including myself, were struggling. However, now with the current state of affairs, students are facing unprecedented challenges.

I was raised by a single mom who, when I was eight years old, was diagnosed with breast cancer. In 2008, during the economic recession, she ended up losing her job, we lost our house, and we were left in significant medical debt. Deciding to pursue a degree after high school was incredibly nerve-wracking for me as I was completely dependent on financial aid. While I have been fortunate enough to have had a considerable amount of my tuition offset by internal and external scholarships, I have still been reliant on state and federal funding to cover additional fees and expenses associated with attending a post-secondary institution.

~~A~~fter speaking with my college's financial aid office, I learned that with expanded eligibility for the Washington College grant, I qualified for state funding. Especially with the current pandemic and economic uncertainty, this was a huge weight off my shoulders. **Now, as a recent graduate this past December with my bachelor's degree, I am especially grateful to our state legislature for prioritizing the next generation's future.**

Education acts as a social equalizer, inherently tied to economic and social justice. By allocating additional monies for policies like the Washington College Grant, protecting higher education dollars, looking at basic needs like food and housing insecurities, legislators would be taking a stance against socio-economic unfairness, austerity measures that disproportionately target lower-income and communities of color, and would be investing in our futures.

We must preserve and expand the critical supports needed to get more students like me from high school to and through postsecondary education. That's how we recover from pandemic-related setbacks, develop the workforce of the future, and help more Washington students disproportionately impacted, discover, and achieve their dreams right here in Washington state.