

ANTHONY G. BROWN
4TH DISTRICT, MARYLAND

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
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INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
HOUSE ETHICS COMMITTEE

U.S. House of Representatives

WASHINGTON OFFICE
1323 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-8699

PRINCE GEORGE'S OFFICE
9701 APOLLO DRIVE, SUITE 103
UPPER MARLBORO, MD 20774
(301) 458-2600

ANNE ARUNDEL OFFICE
2666 RIVA ROAD, SUITE 120
ANNAPOLIS, MD 21401
(410) 266-3249

December 15, 2020

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Chairwoman
House Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Appropriations
1036 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger:

I write to express our support for language in the next COVID-19 relief legislation that would provide flexibility for state agencies to use the State Fiscal Relief Fund to aid students and their families by releasing them from their privately-owned, on-campus housing leases.

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse effect on our institutions of higher-learning and the students they serve. Institutions are losing millions of dollars' worth of expecting housing funds, as students choose to stay home this semester to stay safe and healthy. Students who sought to live on campus are now being negatively impacted as colleges and universities choose to go fully virtual as COVID-19 cases surge. They are now stuck in year-long leases when many would prefer to be safe and return home.

This is a particular problem in Maryland. Prior to the pandemic, multiple universities in my state established Public Private Partnerships (P3's) to build on-campus housing for students, due to a severe shortfall of residential units available through traditional college or university owned housing. While these living facilities are located on campus, they are not owned by the University and are privately managed -- therefore the University or College does not have control over rent payments that students are required to pay. Due to the pandemic, most universities are in the process of providing some form of reimbursement for student housing payments if they decide to transition to online learning. Unfortunately, students living in these privately managed housing units are not being reimbursed. This will impact nearly six thousand families at the University of Maryland, College Park alone.

As cases of COVID-19 continue to rise, and institutions of higher-education return to online learning, more students are contractually trapped in leases they cannot afford to pay. In order for these students and families to financially stay afloat, we ask that language be included in the next COVID-19 relief bill to provide flexibility for states to use the State Fiscal Relief

Fund to reimburse landlords of on-campus student housing, but subject to a public-private partnership between the landlord and the public college or university. The funds shall be used for lost rental payments due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so long as the landlord fully releases its student tenants and their guarantors from liability under the lease agreement.

This is an uncertain time for students and families across the country. Institutions of higher education are telling their students to return home as campuses shut down and students return to online learning. We must ensure that a housing technicality does not put an additional burden on students as they navigate through these unsettled times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A.G. Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anthony" and last name "Brown" clearly legible.

Anthony G. Brown