

## **Supporting Initiatives to Improve College Access and Affordability and Reducing Student Debt**

### **Background:**

Obtaining a postsecondary credential has never been more important and has also never been more expensive and financially burdensome. The Institute for College Access & Success (“TICAS”) has found that there “are striking inequities in public college affordability both within and across states, with the lowest income students facing the most extreme and unrealistic financial expectations.” TICAS recommends that “policymakers should begin by focusing attention and investments on the students for whom college is least affordable,” that the maximum award amount for federal Pell Grants should be increased, that state grant aid should be increased and improved, and that both state and federal governments should invest in higher education.

Governor Terry McAuliffe has heeded this call by supporting public education through initiatives like the Affordable Pathways grants, which encourage partnerships between PreK-12 programs and public higher education institutions to increase credit and credential completion rates.

The average debt for undergraduate students attending public and private non-profit four-year institutions in the Commonwealth of Virginia is \$27,717, and the proportion of students with debt is 59%. Student debt remains a significant problem for current and former students and precludes them from adequately saving for retirement or buying a home and it is “not out of the question that [the Public Service Loan Forgiveness] program will eventually be scaled back in some way in the future.”

**Therefore, be it Resolved that,** the 2017 Eighth District Democratic Convention:

1. Reaffirms its support for the Commonwealth of Virginia’s investment in higher education through initiatives such as the Affordable Pathways grants.
2. Calls on Virginia lawmakers to study and implement initiatives that would allow students to reduce debt after employment in public service and to explore similar opportunities for students to reduce debt after completing approved unpaid civil and/or community service.