

# YOUNG INVINCIBLES

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March 24, 2021

The Honorable Senator Creighton and Members of the Committee  
Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Chairman Creighton and Committee Members,

My name is Aurora Harris. I am the Southern Regional Director at Young Invincibles (YI), a national, non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization focused on critical economic issues facing young people ages 18 to 34. We are based in Austin and Houston, and work with young people throughout Texas, sharing in their academic challenges and successes. I am reaching out in support of Senate Bill 165, and to share stories regarding the hurdles faced by Texas students in the last year.

At the heart of our work are student voices and experiences, and we lift up young adult stories in our mission to ensure that young people have a voice. We have been in close communication with students over the last year, and worked with them through the pandemic, winter storm crisis, and the many economic and educational challenges faced during unprecedented transitions to postsecondary education. **We believe that more course flexibility would provide critical support to students navigating crises, ensuring that students can scale back their workload as needed while remaining enrolled toward graduation.**

When experiencing a crisis, there are direct and serious impacts to student wellness. As Nickoli, a current student at the University of Texas at Austin shared, "I think it is incredibly important that our colleges are aware of the mental toll and stress that could result from the combination of social isolation and a rapid transformation of our educational system."<sup>1</sup> Emma, another University of Texas at Austin student shared that, "My mental health took a hit during the COVID-19 outbreak and it only got worse as it went on."<sup>2</sup> We have heard from countless more students about the mental health impacts of the pandemic, as well as other key crises such as illness or taking care of loved ones.

Priscilla, a University of Houston student and essential worker stated that she was "relieved to know I would still be able to get a paycheck from work. But then I realized how bad my position actually was. As a cashier, I come into contact with a lot of people, and as I work during a

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<sup>1</sup> Young Invincibles, 2020. "The COVID-19 pandemic hit much closer to home than I thought it ever would and now it's just a waiting game." [Young Adults in Austin reflect on COVID-19.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Young Invincibles, 2020. "The COVID-19 pandemic hit much closer to home than I thought it ever would and now it's just a waiting game." [Young Adults in Austin reflect on COVID-19.](#)

pandemic that pushes isolating practices, I obviously cannot socially distance myself. My risk of contracting COVID-19 is higher than others and it feels horrible to know I could possibly increase the spread. Not only that, but I have recently become uninsured so the possibility of high medical costs is also a looming thought in my head.”<sup>3</sup>

When navigating these crises, students are seeking practical solutions that will make a difference in their day to day education. Mikayla, also a University of Texas at Austin student, shared, “It is my hope that federal aid can be administered to all schools to provide students with access to the Internet, an updated computer system to take their classes, and other resources depending on the students’ needs. It is also my hope that any class be able to change to pass/fail.”<sup>4</sup> When speaking with students about the pandemic and winter storm crisis, we’ve heard that it’s not just direct aid needed - which is extremely critical- but also real-time schedule changes that are sometimes necessary.

Time and time again, we have heard from students this year that are trying to stay committed to their school and work while experiencing unprecedented amounts of stress. We ask the Committee to center student needs and allow for more flexibility in course loads.

Thank you greatly for listening to the voices of Texas students on their experiences.

Thank you,

Aurora Harris, Regional Director  
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Young Invincibles

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<sup>3</sup> Young Invincibles, 2020. “I went from feeling invincible to vulnerable and scared in an instant.” [Young Adults in Houston reflect on COVID-19](#).

<sup>4</sup> Young Invincibles, 2020. “The COVID-19 pandemic hit much closer to home than I thought it ever would and now it’s just a waiting game.” [Young Adults in Austin reflect on COVID-19](#).