

May 18, 2020

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairwoman  
House Appropriations Labor-HHS-Education  
Subcommittee  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Labor-HHS-Education  
Subcommittee  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Labor-HHS-Education  
Subcommittee  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Labor-HHS-Education  
Subcommittee  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Cole, and Ranking Member Murray:

As you work on providing economic relief to American families amid the COVID-19 crisis and move forward with the FY21 appropriations process, we, the undersigned organizations, write to urge you to invest in and protect the Pell Grant program — the nation’s cornerstone investment in higher education — to ensure students have the funds to pursue postsecondary education during this emergency and in its aftermath.

Additional investments in Pell Grants and colleges and universities are urgently needed to cushion the current economic downturn, invest in a stronger recovery, and prevent yet another spike in student debt. As part of your next economic relief package, we urge Congress to significantly increase the purchasing power of the Pell Grant by doubling the maximum award. Additionally, as the FY21 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations process moves forward, we ask you to commit to at least ensuring that the grant increases at the rate of inflation; we also ask you to commit to keeping the Pell Grant surplus funds within the Pell Grant program to help secure the program’s long-term viability.

As you know, Pell Grants are the foundation of our national investment in higher education. They allow nearly seven million low- and middle-income students — including nearly 60 percent of Black undergraduates and almost half of Latino undergraduates — to attend and complete college. However, the current maximum Pell Grant already covers less than one-third of the cost of attending a four-year public college, the lowest share in more than 40 years. Pell Grant recipients today are more than twice as likely as other students to have student loans, and grant recipients who borrow graduate with over \$4,500 more debt than their higher-income peers.

Current and incoming students will be facing unprecedented struggles when starting the new academic year — and, likely, for years to come — and many students will need significant additional support to pay for college. States are nearly certain to be cutting their own need-based aid programs alongside overall cuts to higher education budgets in the wake of COVID-19. These cuts will lead to large increases in the financial burden on students and families. Additionally, there may be an influx of students enrolling in higher education if the economic downturn persists, [as seen during the Great Recession](#).

It is critical to boost the purchasing power of the Pell Grant to meet this need. Doubling the maximum grant would be a strong start, and would boost the grant's purchasing power to cover approximately half of the costs of attending a four-year public college. Additional investments to restore the grant's purchasing power to its historic peak (when it covered approximately three-quarters of the cost of attending a four-year public institution) would be more than welcome. At a minimum, we strongly urge appropriators to continue their recent pattern of ensuring that the award at least keeps pace with inflation.

Congress should also help ensure the long-term viability of the Pell Grant program by confirming that the program's surplus funds remain within the program. At a time when students and families are likely to need major additional help to pay for college, it is imperative to prevent cuts that put the program in jeopardy and generate unnecessary uncertainty for students and schools. The ability of the current Pell surplus to fund much-needed awards is maximized if raids for other priorities are prevented.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, students pursuing higher education will face uncharted obstacles for years to come. By acting now to make long-needed investments in the Pell Grant program, and committing to protecting the existing funds within the program, Congress will help shore up students' access to postsecondary education, limit a run-up in student debt, and help restore a strong economy.

Thank you for attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

10,000 Degrees  
Advancing Academics  
Alabama Possible  
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers  
American Association of University Women (AAUW)  
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)  
Arizona College Access Network  
Bottom Line  
The Campaign for College Opportunity  
Center for Law & Social Policy (CLASP)  
Center for Responsible Lending  
College Advising Corps  
College Beyond  
College Crusade of Rhode Island  
College Forward  
College Now Greater Cleveland  
College Possible  
College Success Arizona  
College Success Foundation  
Consumer Action  
CORE Scholars Foundation  
Council on Social Work Education  
Degrees of Change  
Education is Freedom

The Education Trust  
Evolve502  
Fulfillment Fund  
Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce  
Georgia Budget and Policy Institute  
The Graduate! Network, Inc.  
Higher Education Loan Coalition  
Illinois College Access Network  
The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)  
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)  
Institute for Women's Policy Research  
John Burton Advocates for Youth  
KIPP  
LeadMN—College Students Connecting for Change  
The League of Student Advocates  
Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC)  
Michigan College Access Network  
Mt. San Antonio College  
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU)  
National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)  
National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs (NASSGAP)  
National College Attainment Network (NCAN)  
National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients)  
National Education Association  
National Urban League  
NY PIRG  
On Point for College  
Operation Jump Start  
Operation Jump Start | Long Beach, CA  
Partners for Education at Berea College  
PHENOM (Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts)  
Reach Higher Montana  
The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis  
Shasta College  
Skills2Compete—Colorado  
South High School  
Southern California College Access Network (SoCal CAN)  
St. Louis Graduates  
Student Action  
Student Debt Crisis  
Student Veterans of America  
Tennessee College Access and Success Network  
Third Way  
uAspire  
UnidosUS  
University of Washington  
U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG)  
Women Employed

Woodward Hines Education Foundation  
Wyman  
Yes We Must Coalition  
Young Invincibles  
Youth 2 Leaders Education Foundation