

July 22, 2019

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education Labor, &
Pensions
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, &
Pensions
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

In February of last year, you both expressed interest in reinstating access to Pell Grants for incarcerated students and many of the undersigned organizations and stakeholders wrote a letter to you expressing our support for reinstating this population's Pell eligibility. Earlier this year, the Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act – legislation to repeal the Pell ban and restore the ability for incarcerated individuals to access higher education - was introduced with bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress.

Now, as Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization discussions proceed, the 54 undersigned organizations representing higher education, criminal justice, corrections, faith, business and academic sectors would like to underscore the continued importance of removing federal financial aid barriers for currently incarcerated students and renew our call to support justice-impacted students' access to higher education in a comprehensive reauthorization.

Restoring educational opportunities for incarcerated students can have a tremendous and widespread impact and holds the unique potential to strengthen families, communities, local and state economies, correctional climates, and our national civic life.

When incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students access high-quality postsecondary educational opportunities, it provides them with a strong chance to turn their lives around. Higher education provides individuals with a path forward to find meaningful employment or continue their education post-release, and it can, in turn, ease re-entry for individuals, strengthen the families and communities that individuals return to, and provide local industry with talent to fill 21st century jobs and a new population of empowered consumers.

Higher education programs operating in prison yield enormous benefits for corrections staff and administration, in addition to the students who participate. Corrections leaders share that programs improve the climate in facilities, make facilities safer, and provide an opportunity for

incarcerated individuals to set goals for themselves, mentor, and engage with other students in a way that benefits the entire facility.

Finally, reinstating Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated students is also a sound investment, while maintaining the ban will cost taxpayers more in the long term. In 1994, the Institute for Higher Education Policy found that the amount of Pell Grant funds awarded to incarcerated students was less than one percent of the program's entire funding.ⁱ Moreover, every dollar invested in prison education yields a savings of at least four to five dollars on re-imprisonment costs for the public.ⁱⁱ

Repealing the ban is an essential and urgent first step, but we urge you to design policy in a way that ensures that higher education programming offered in prison makes a real difference for all participating students and that programming is accessible to all students who may benefit from educational opportunities.

Just as high-quality education is vital for campus-based students, it is critical that incarcerated students are participating in programs that have a real and measurable impact. We urge you to steward our taxpayer dollars responsibly and ensure that Pell Grant funding is only made available to high-quality higher education programs operating in correctional facilities.

Additionally, we believe that education should be made available to all incarcerated individuals who higher education and corrections partners deem eligible to enroll in programming. While higher education in prison clearly sets students up for successful reentry, it is also important for individuals who may never leave prison as well. In programs that currently enroll individuals who are serving life without parole, higher education and correctional partners agree that education can often make the greatest impact for these students. We would like this discretion to remain with states and local agencies, who know the most about their own needs and can set their own student eligibility requirements.

We urge you to leverage ongoing HEA reauthorization discussions as a landmark opportunity to find common ground on this issue and remove these federal barriers that our country can no longer afford to keep in place. We hope that you will demonstrate true bipartisan leadership and help this often-forgotten population access the transformative benefits of postsecondary education.

We recognize the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions plays an important governance role, while also affirming and uplifting national educational priorities. With the reauthorization of our nation's landmark higher education law, your committee has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform our higher education system in a way that builds and sustains a 21st century workforce and an engaged, educated citizenry.

We hope you will take this opportunity to remove a significant barrier to educational opportunity for individuals across the country. Lifting the ban itself would add incredible value at essentially no cost.

Sincerely,

The undersigned

- Alvin Community College
- American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)
- American Council on Education (ACE)
- Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
- Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)
- Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
- Association of State and Federal Directors of Correctional Education
- Center for American Progress
- Center for Compassion, Integrity, and Secular Ethics at Life University
- Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
- City University of New York (CUNY) Freedom Prep
- College and Community Fellowship
- Columbia University Center for Justice
- Correctional Education Association
- Defy Expectations Filmworks, Linda Genereux, Producer
- Drug Reform Coordination Network
- FAMM
- Florida Prison Education Project
- Georgetown University Prisons and Justice Initiative
- Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice

- Hudson Link for Higher Education
- Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)
- Interfaith Prison Ministry for Women
- Ivy Tech Community College
- Jesuit Conference – Office of Justice and Ecology
- John Jay College Prisoner Reentry Institute
- JustLeadershipUSA
- Kelli Canada, School of Social Work, University of Missouri
- Lee College, Huntsville Center
- Marymount Manhattan College
- Mercy College
- Miami Dade College
- Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce
- NASPA
- National Education Association (NEA)
- Northwestern Prison Education Program
- Operation Restoration
- Prison Arts Collective
- Prison Education Project (Arizona)
- Prison Scholar Fund
- Robert Kelchen, Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy, Seton Hall University
- Root & Rebound
- Safer Foundation
- State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)
- Students for Sensible Drug Policy
- Tennessee Coalition for Sensible Justice
- Terri LeClercq
- The Education Trust
- The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program
- The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)
- The Osborne Association
- Third Way

- U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

ⁱ Institute for Higher Education Policy (1994). "Pell Grants: Are Prisoners the Program's Biggest Problem?" Retrieved from: <http://www.ihep.org/research/publications/policy-steps-pell-grants-are-prisoners-programs-biggest-problem-0>.

ⁱⁱ Davis, Lois M., Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, and Jeremy N. V. Miles. (2013) "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta---Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults." Retrieved from: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html.