

October 21, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Labor-H Approp. Subcom.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Labor-H Approp. Subcom.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Labor-H Approp. Subcom.
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Labor-H Approp. Subcom.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

The undersigned organizations urge you to oppose any attempt to raid Pell Grant funding as you advance FY 2017 appropriations, and instead stand up for students and protect the funds for use within the Pell Grant program only.

Pell Grants are the nation's most important investment in higher education, and the program is still recovering from harmful cuts made as recently as 2012. Pell Grants provide access to college for millions of low-income students who might not otherwise attend, serving nearly 8 million students- most from families making \$40,000 or less. Nearly half of all Latino undergraduate students and more than 60 percent of African American students receive Pell grants. Yet, after years of declining purchasing power, the maximum grant now covers less than 30 percent of the cost of attending a four-year public college, the lowest share in more than 40 years. And Pell Grant students are now more than twice as likely to have loans as other students.

The purchasing power of Pell Grants, already so diminished, will only fall further as the annual inflation adjustment expires after the 2017 award year, making it even more critical to block any attempt to redirect funds out of the program. In fact, a number of investments are urgently needed in the program, including one that was recently agreed to by the Senate Appropriations Committee, reestablishing year-round access to Pell Grants, which could help approximately one million students complete college faster. Other essential steps needed to strengthen Pell Grants include extending the annual inflation adjustment, raising the maximum award, and restoring Pell eligibility for defrauded students. Taking money away from Pell Grants would place these key improvements out of reach when a college degree has never been more important or less affordable. Redirecting funds away from the program could also leave Pell Grants more vulnerable to future harmful cuts.

Raiding Pell to fund other programs would exacerbate student debt and limit opportunity for the very students who most need a college education to advance in our economy and society. As you make decisions on funding levels in the FY 2017 omnibus, we urge your leadership to reject any and all efforts to take funding from the Pell Grant program.

We appreciate your attention to this important issue.

Signed,

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU)
California State Student Association (CSSA)
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Complete College America
Consumer Action
Consumers Union
Demos
Generation Progress
Higher Ed, Not Debt
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU)
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)
Jobs for the Future
Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition
NAACP
National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA)
National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
National Skills Coalition
One Wisconsin Now
Scholarship America
Student Debt Crisis
The Education Trust
The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)
The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU)
Thurgood Marshall College Fund
United Negro College Fund (UNCF)
Veterans Education Success (VES)
United States Student Association (USSA)
uAspire
U.S. PIRG
Young Invincibles

CC: Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committee
Members of the House and Senate