

October 7, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Leahy:

As you work toward a final spending agreement for fiscal year 2020, the undersigned organizations representing students, veterans, colleges, consumers, financial aid administrators, college access providers, unions, researchers, scholarship providers, education advocates, and civil rights advocates write to stress the critical importance of protecting and investing in the Pell Grant program. We greatly appreciate that the Senate's proposed Labor-HHS-Education spending bill includes a \$135 increase to the maximum Pell award, which will ensure that the grant at least keeps pace with inflation.

However, we strongly urge you to oppose the overall Labor-HHS-Education spending allocation and the accompanying proposed \$1.3 billion rescission from the Pell reserve fund and to instead fully retain all current Pell funds where they belong — in the Pell Grant program. A \$1.3 billion cut would put much-needed investments to strengthen Pell further out of reach. This cut would also place the program at risk of future cuts to grant amounts or eligibility that would exacerbate student debt and limit access to higher education.

As you know, Pell Grants are the foundation of our national investment in higher education. They allow more than 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. College graduates have higher wages and lower unemployment rates than their peers without degrees, and Pell Grants are one of the keystones for growing a diverse, robust workforce and economy.

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 recipients who borrow graduate with over \$4,500 more debt than their higher income peers.

At a time when a postsecondary credential or degree is an increasingly necessary gateway to a meaningful career, a strong Pell Grant is critical to ensuring that students from all financial backgrounds are able to participate and grow a strong, diverse economy. We therefore urge you to protect this critical program and reject the proposed \$1.3 billion rescission without cutting funding from any other education program, and to provide adequate resources to support all of the important programs in this appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Federation of Teachers
Americans for Financial Reform
Associated Students of the University of California

Association of Big Ten Students
Association of Young Americans (AYA)
Cal State Student Association
California Competes
California EDGE Coalition
Center for Responsible Lending
Consumer Action
Consumer Reports
Deeds Action Fund
Democrats for Education Reform
Education Reform Now Advocacy
Excelencia in Education
Faculty Association of California Community Colleges
Foothill-De Anza Community College District
Generation Progress
Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce
Higher Education Loan Coalition (HELC)
Higher Learning Advocates
Hildreth Institute
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
Jobs for the Future (JFF)
John Burton Advocates for Youth
Jolt Initiative
KIPP
LeadMN – College Students Connecting for Change
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce
Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition
NAACP
NACAC
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)
National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs (NASSGAP)
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA)
National Campus Leadership Council
National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients)
National Education Association
National Skills Coalition
National Urban League
New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)
PHENOM (Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts)
Raise the Barr
Scholarship America
Shasta College
Silicon Valley Leadership Group
Student Debt Crisis
Student Parent HELP Center
Student Veterans of America
The Campaign for College Opportunity
The Education Trust

The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)

U.S. Public Interest Research Group (USPIRG)

uAspire

UNCF (United Negro College Fund, Inc.)

Univ. of Hawai'i – Bridge to Hope

University of California Student Association

Veterans Education Success

Women Employed

Woodstock Institute

Yes We Must Coalition

Young Invincibles

cc: The Honorable Nita Lowey, Chairwoman, House Appropriations Committee; The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee